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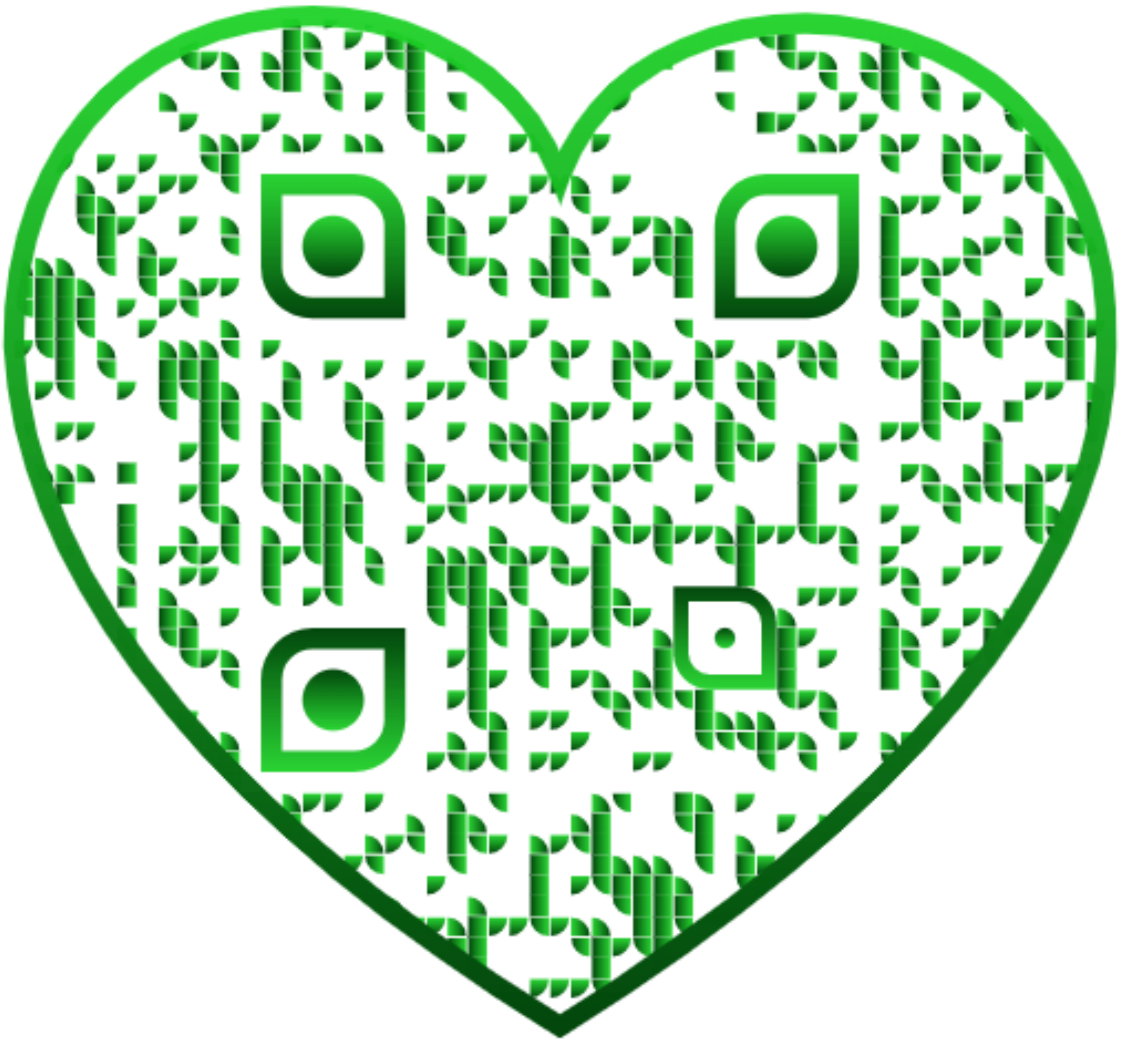

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British strummertime...

Inevitably, as I write this, it's raining. Having waded through more waterlogged fields during festival season than I care to – or possibly even can – remember, you'd think I'd have learnt my lesson after 30, ahem, something years on Planet Earth. And yet, as sure as Wimbledon's strawberries and cream will be soured by heavy skies, I still approach the summer with the hope of spending long, balmy evenings outdoors. And whenever this happens – especially if there's a fire – there always seems to be an acoustic guitar. It's this deep-rooted connection between acoustic guitars and summertime that leads us to this month's cover feature.

If you are a casual strummer who plays primarily electric guitar looking to upgrade to a more serious acoustic suited to your favoured playing style, then let *G&B* be your guide through the tonewood forest and the swaying fields of phosphor bronze beyond. Once you've chosen your instrument, what to play? If there's a crowd, then the best answer is almost certainly "something they all know", but the expanded instalment of Chord Clinic that begins on p24 should help improve your acoustic vocabulary and provide you with plenty of inspiration for your own songwriting endeavours. Let us know how you get on, and don't forget to pack those wellies...

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MEET THE EXPERTS...

HUW PRICE

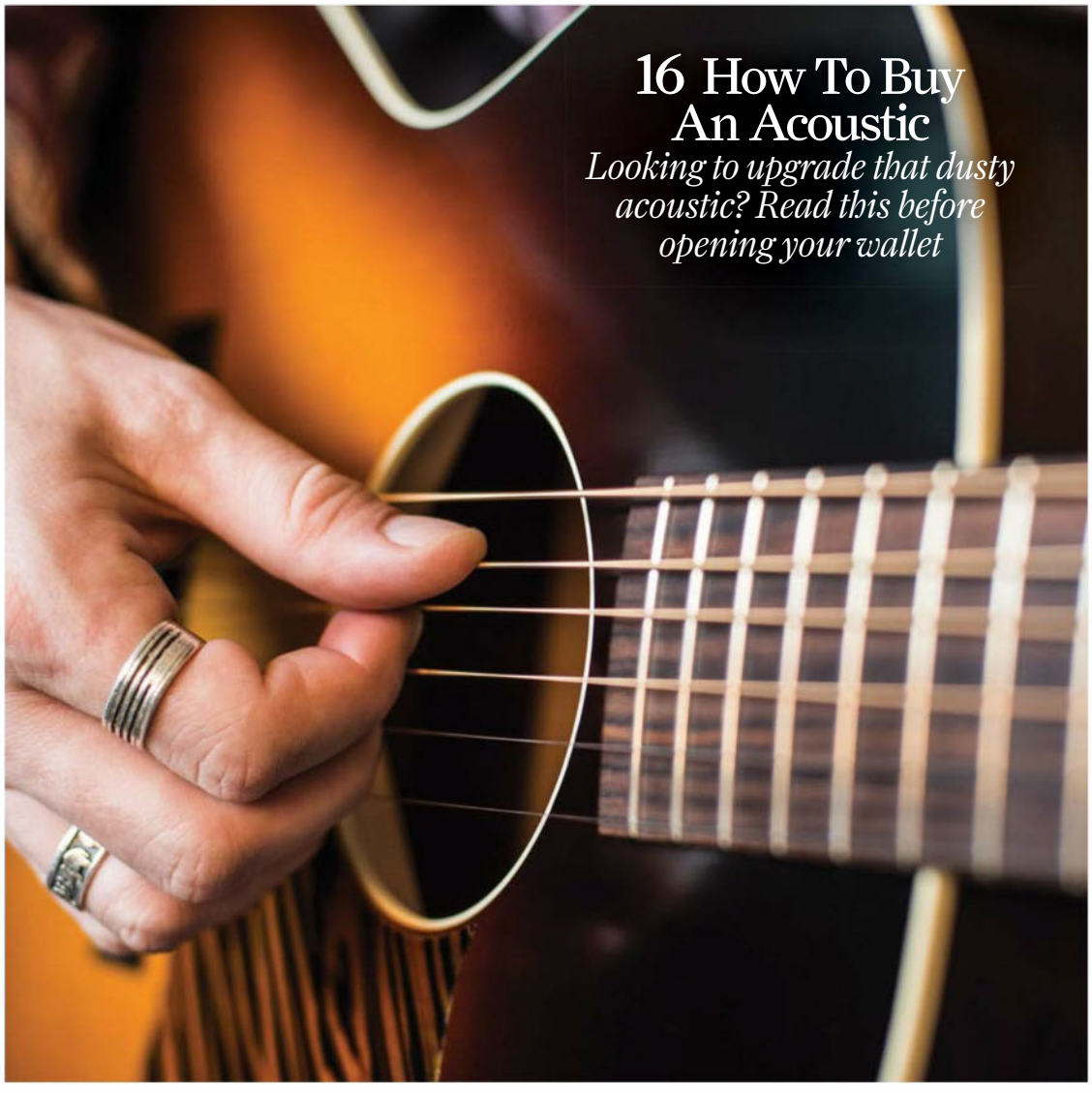
Our senior product specialist spent 16 years as a pro audio engineer working with the likes of David Bowie, Primal Scream and NIck Cave. His book *Recording Guitar & Bass* was published in 2002. He also builds and maintains guitars, amps and FX.

DAVE HUNTER

Dave Hunter is a writer and musician who has worked in the US and the UK. A former editor of this title, he is the author of *The Guitar Amp Handbook*, *Guitar Effects Pedals*, *Amped* and *The Fender Telecaster*. Check out his column on page 8.

RICHARD PURVIS

A reformed drummer, Richard has been gigging for over 20 years as a guitarist and bassist, and working as a music journalist for almost as long. He also composes music for television, and is legally married to his 1966 Gibson Melody Maker.



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Opening bars...

Emerging talent on *G&B*'s radar and a chance to win an Avian Songbird acoustic

ONES TO WATCH

20's plenty for Hampshire trio

BLAENAVON

Hampshire's Blaenavon have wasted little time in making an impression. All three members are only 20, but the band have been turning heads in the US and Europe, landing high-profile festival bookings and support slots with the likes of Foals and Bloc Party, while recording a debut album that looks set to further up the ante.

The band, who initially formed to play a school talent show, were only 15 and still studying for their GCSEs when they signed to the Transgressive label, and have since gone on to become one of the most talked about emerging indie acts in the UK, with slots at this summer's Latitude and Reading & Leeds festivals in the diary.

Lead track from 2015's *Miss World* EP, *Hell Is My Head* caught *G&B*'s ears with its soaring dynamics, sweet, shimmering Strat rhythm guitar part and euphoric, angular leadlines. They've impressed BBC Radio 1 DJ Zane Lowe too – he asked for the band's permission to play *I Will Be The World,* the lead single from their forthcoming new album, before it was mixed and mastered after seeing them perform at the SXSW Festival in Austin, Texas. The song has huge atmospherics, a menacing bassline and some haunting volume fades from guitarist/vocalist Ben Gregory's Strat. Fans of At The Drive-In, Idlewild and Blaenavon's label-mates Foals are highly likely to dig it.

Having played together for six years, the band's music has inevitably gained in maturity, as bassist Frank Wright, who started out as a drummer, reflects: "We've definitely evolved over the time, as our music tastes have changed and we've got better at saying what we want to say. I listen to loads of different jazz and world music, Ben is really into singer-songwriters like Elliott Smith and 70s bands like Television and The Electric Prunes, and Harris [McMillan, drummer] is the biggest Radiohead fan I know. We try to make it as eclectic as possible. We try to keep it super-dynamic, and it's very vivid because of the way we approach it."

The album sessions, marshalled by Grammy-nominated producer Jim Abbiss – whose CV includes work with Arctic Monkeys, Adele and Bjork – proved initially daunting: "We finished recording at the end of January, and it's just finished being mixed. We're really happy with the end result," says Wright. "I was a bit nervous when we went in to start because the producer was a bit daunting and we didn't quite get on with him, but after a couple of days we got on really well. He's obviously got a lot of experience in taking young bands and helping them realise their musical vision."

Wright and Gregory have well-stocked pedalboards, with the bassist running his 90s Japanese Fender Jazz bass through a Boss Bass Chorus, Ibanez Phat-hed and Electro-Harmonix Bass Big Muff into his Ashdown head and cab. Gregory uses a Fender Strat and Twin Reverb, with an EHX Epitome (multi-effect combining Micro Pog, Stereo Electric Mistress and Holy Grail Plus), Marshall Jackhammer and Big Muff, employing the Epitome's freeze function to delicious effect.

The band's live shows, characterised by their high-octane feel, have seen them build an enthusiastic following across Europe, and they return to the continent for a headline tour later this year. "We've played in Europe quite a bit in the past – in 2013 and 2014, we did a lot of gigs in Germany, France, Luxembourg, Switzerland and Poland," says Wright. "There was a time in our career when we did very well in Europe so we went there more than we played in the UK. Hopefully, those people won't have forgotten about us."

Blaenavon won't be compromising the frenetic feel of those live shows in order to adapt to larger festival stages. "We play even the smallest of gigs in a stadium-rock way," laughs Wright, "so I'm not sure we'll change our approach. We've never been to Latitude, but we've heard it's an amazing festival. We just give it our all every time."

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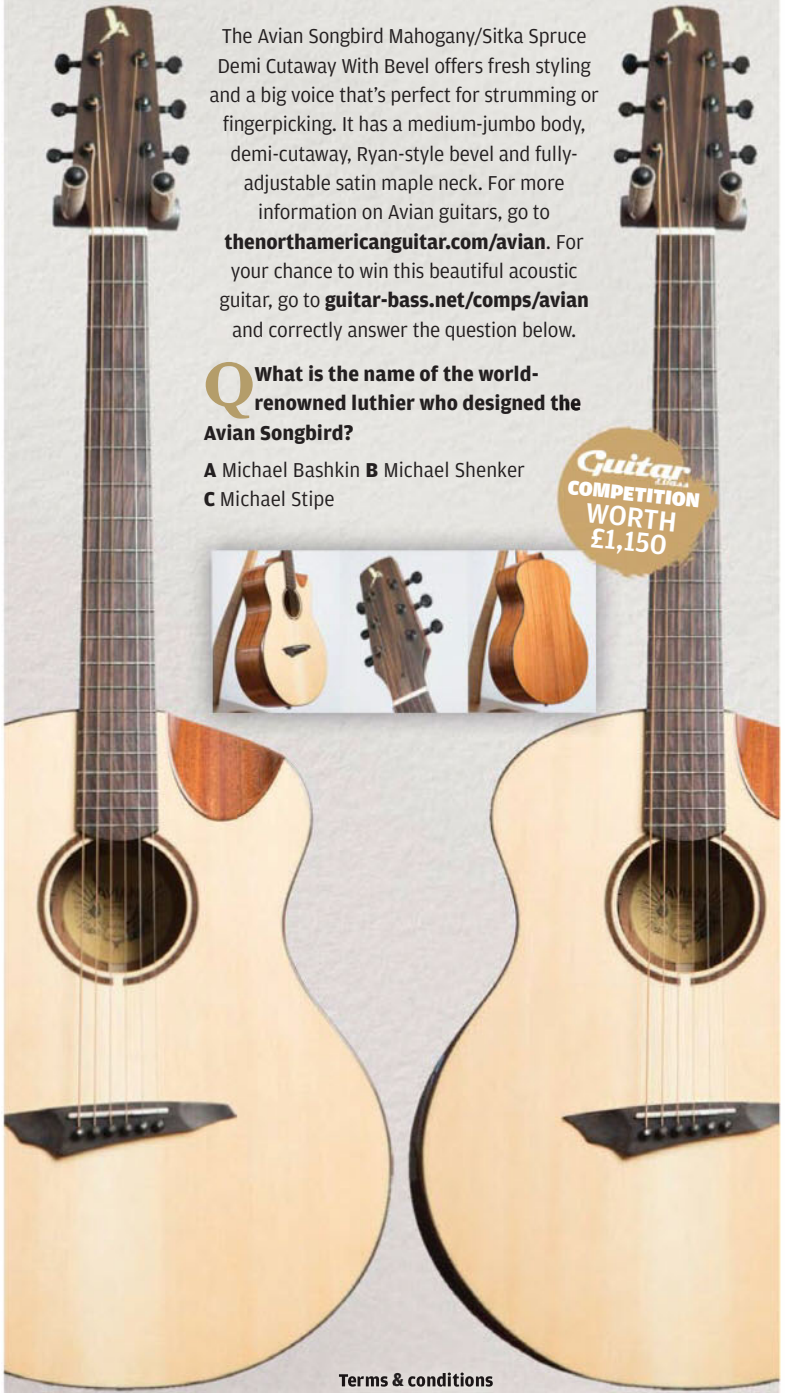

The Avian Songbird Mahogany/Sitka Spruce Demi Cutaway With Bevel offers fresh styling and a big voice that's perfect for strumming or fingerpicking. It has a medium-jumbo body, demi-cutaway, Ryan-style bevel and fully-adjustable satin maple neck. For more information on Avian guitars, go to **thenorthamericanguitar.com/avian**. For your chance to win this beautiful acoustic guitar, go to **guitar-bass.net/comps/avian** and correctly answer the question below.

Q What is the name of the world-renowned luthier who designed the Avian Songbird?

A Michael Bashkin **B** Michael Shenker
C Michael Stipe

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Our first edition is a play on the custom car colours used by Fender in the 50s and 60s but, since Gordon Smith are a very British brand of guitar, we felt it appropriate to look to Britain for our custom colours. In this series you will find six classic Morris Minor finishes, the lacquer supplied by official Morris sources: Clipper Blue, Racing Green, Burgundy, Highway Yellow, Sage Green and Trafalgar Blue. We've also added a custom pickguard (designed by Forsyth's very own James) in a cream plastic that perfectly matches the finish, and the elegant Gotoh bridge and chromed control knobs both help to continue the car theme. The pickup has a great Manchester pedigree, made in Chorlton by Jaime at The Creamery and designed by Jaime and New Order / Joy Division guitarist Bernard Sumner.

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Letters from America

David Myka has been building guitars in Seattle for three decades. **DAVE HUNTER** takes a look at his stunning Hawaiian koa Studio Special

DAVE HUNTER
Dave Hunter is a writer and musician who has worked in the US and the UK. A former editor of this title, he is the author of numerous books including *The Guitar Amp Handbook*, *Guitar Effects Pedals*, *Amped* and *The Fender Telecaster*.

I've never given much thought to koa, other than admiring its beauty in several vintage Hawaiian acoustic guitars. But David Myka uses it to what is arguably the most impressive effect I've seen in this Studio Special, and man is this a gorgeous wood.

Outwardly, you might even think this guitar is all about the wood – the figure of the koa in the neck rivals that in the body's top, the ebony fingerboard and headstock facing are superb, and even the body's back displays an impressive piece of Honduran mahogany. However, a tremendous amount of thought has gone into every aspect of this guitar, the result of which is an instrument for which you might expect to pay twice this price from other small-shop makers.

David Myka is a largely self-trained luthier who has been making guitars in Seattle, Washington, for 30 years. "I started out building guitars as a broke teenager with a friend who had a small garden shed with a few woodworking tools and a workbench," he tells us. "We wanted the guitars we saw in the magazines at the time, and we collected whatever we could find: old guitars in the trash, scrap materials, the ever-elusive books on building guitars, and whatever electronic parts we could scrap from old radios and the like. We had no idea what we were doing or how it should be done, but we forged ahead and built guitar after guitar. Looking back, the lack of training allowed us to be completely free to explore new design ideas and methods of construction. Fast-forward 30 years and things are pretty much the same. The only difference is the quality of the workshop and the materials, and of course the evolution of the design."

While the Studio Special clearly derives some inspiration from the world's most famous single-cutaway, set-neck, dual-humbucker guitar, this thing is about as unlike a 'Les Paul copy' as you could hope to experience. As Myka puts it, it is an instrument for the player who wants a guitar that is rooted in the classics, but is "not limited by the narrow scope that those instruments offer". Much of that "not limited" is found in the Studio Special's versatile switching; but it's right there in the wood, too. In addition to its subtle yet unabashed elegance, this instrument is superbly ergonomic: it feels as if it has grown into some long-evolving organic form, rather than being chiseled and shaped in a workshop. The neck-to-body joint is achieved in a way that is essentially heel-less, with a sensually carved and sanded curve that flows from one to the other in a manner that just begs you to cup your hand to it. Similarly, Myka has rounded the body's back edges in a way that I've never before seen, achieving, most notably, a ribcage contour at the upper

A tremendous amount of thought has gone into every aspect of this guitar

Brian Emery

KEY FEATURES

Myka Studio Special

- **PRICE** Approximately £3,269 as reviewed, excluding shipping and duties
- **BODY** Honduran mahogany, Hawaiian koa top
- **NECK** Glued-in Hawaiian koa neck with slim C profile
- **FINGERBOARD** Ebony (aged 35 years), 12" radius, 1.6875" width at nut (bone)
- **FRETS** 22 medium-jumbo
- **PICKUPS** Lollar Imperial humbuckers
- **ELECTRONICS** Master volume, master tone, five-way selector, three-way toggle (series/single-coil/parallel) for each pickup
- **FINISH** Hard shellac
- **HARDWARE** Locking Hipshot Trim Lok tuners, Gotoh tune-o-matic bridge, Myka string-through tailpiece
- **CASE** TKL rectangular hardshell case
- **CONTACT** mykaguitars.com guitars.electric@gmail.com

waist that is almost invisible within the broad profile of that carve, yet is utterly comfortable whether you encounter the guitar seated or on the strap. If it isn't clear already, this guy likes wood, and he knows how to work it.

In some ways, the aesthetic speaks of a finely crafted classical guitar or other early 20th century acoustic. The body lines, the dark fingerboard sans inlays, the maple pickup rings and top binding with thin, contrasting inner black purfling, and the ebony 'saddle' over which the strings emerge from the through-body tailpiece, all work toward something very different from the usual electric format. And the finish sets it all off wonderfully; done in ultra-thin yet labour-intensive shellac, it is buffed to a hard, high gloss on the top and headstock face, and satin on the back of the body and neck.

There's a nifty black 'stinger' on the back of the headstock, created by a further veneer of ebony, but the sole nod to real adornment, other than that of the luxurious woods, comes with the mother of pearl headstock logo, an artful rendering of 'Myka' that looks as if it was lifted from a long-buried scroll of an ancient civilisation. At first grab, I'd have thought this neck would be too slim for my liking – hooked, as I am, on chunkier 50s-inspired profiles – but the Studio Special's rounded slim-C sits easily in the hand, and I found myself utterly at home on it in no time at all. This guitar's easy playability clearly has something to do with its faultless setup, but I also really dug the neck's soft shoulders and the way they roll into the edge of the unbound fingerboard.

Unplugged, this guitar has a rich, sonorous tone with a woody foundation and a clear, silky top. Hit it hard and it compresses somewhat like a flat-top acoustic does, in a way that I find extremely appealing, as well as promising interesting things when amped up.

A pair of Lollar Imperial humbuckers with four-conductor wiring run the entire gamut of switching possibilities, or very nearly so, at least. Each pickup has its own three-way mini-toggle for standard series mode, split coil, or both coils wired in parallel (thinner, less poke, but still hum-cancelling). They then run through a five-way selector that delivers neck alone, neck and bridge out of phase, neck and bridge in parallel (the standard 'both' setting), neck and bridge in series (super fat mega-bucker), and bridge alone.

Plugged into both my JTM45-style head and 2x12 cab and a custom AC15-style creation with single Celestion Cream speaker, the 'acoustic-like' unplugged nature of the Studio Special puts the softest pillowy kiss at the front of each note, yet the guitar somehow retains a sharp, fast attack that cuts through with ease when you want to hit it hard.

The neck pickup is plummy and rich, with a woody, vocal quality that works beautifully not only in jazz settings, but in hotter crunch modes for evocative rock or blues soloing. The bridge pickup spans beautifully between meaty twang and jangle, but with plenty of guts to rock just about any stinging lead tone you might need. Put simply, all standard positions will do your usual LP-inspired tricks when called upon, but there are sublime depths and nuances here, alongside an impressive clarity, which I don't find even in many high-end Les Pauls. For my money, it's all good enough right here – you could spare the added expense of the complex switching and leave it as-is. Many players, though, will dig the versatility: the split-coil settings work well on both pickups. Both-out-of-phase is super funky in single-coil mode and honky and Peter Green-ish in 'bucking with some dirt; both-in-series is simply massive.

Put it all together, and the Myka Studio Special is simply a gorgeous, great-sounding, über-versatile, and supremely playable alternative for the guitarist who wants to cover a lot of ground in grand style.

READER BOARDS

PIP TAYLOR tells *G&B* about his 45-year quest to emulate John Martyn's live rig...

KIT LIST

Pip Taylor

- **PEDALS** Maestro Boomerang wah/volume, Electro-Harmonix Big Muff, Musitronics Mu-Tron III envelope follower, MXR Phase 100, Boss CE-1 Chorus Ensemble, Maestro PS-1A Phase Shifter, Maestro Echoplex EP-3 tape delay, LR Baggs DI box for acoustic pickup input
- **PATCH CABLES** George L cables with George L solderless jack plugs
- **BOARD TYPE** Pedaltrain
- **HEAR IT HERE** youtu.be/SDU0Et1xU5s

What inspired this setup?

"This is my vintage pedalboard and amp setup that replicates the rig John Martyn played in the early 70s. It became a 45-year obsession to recreate his setup and work out the tunings. The challenge was to dial in that elusive tone and mellifluous layering on a consistent basis. I heard *Solid Air* and saw him and Danny Thompson at Kingston Polytechnic in 1972, and wondered how could this guy with a sanded-down Yamaha FG dreadnought fill a hall with such wonderful sounds? I became a complete delay geek – I've bought so many I dare not list them. Having tried them all – modern pedals, recreations, rackmounts, multi-effects modules, samplers, etc, I retired many of them having failed to get close to the tone."

Tell us a little about the journey...

"So, having bought a number of tape delays, including Watkins and Roland, I chopped the lot in for a real Echoplex EP-3, bought a Guild D-55 NT and struggled on, driving my family mad with my limited repertoire. A breakthrough came watching John with my wife at a theatre gig in London. I kept my Echoplex, Mu-Tron, Big Muff... setup for special occasions and searched for a reliable modern setup. I have bought Line 6, Roland, Korg SDD-3000, Alesis Quadraverbs, TC Novas, T-Rex delays, a Fulltone Tape Echo... All are great and John used some of these in later years, but I could not get that 70s live sound, until I discovered Charlie Chandler's Guitar Experience. Charlie knew about the Echoplex and had heard of this mythical pedal, the Gibson/Maestro Boomerang – which was key to John's sound in those early days. About five years ago, I discovered the John Martyn Guitar Freaks website and an Echoplex expert in Australia. This set me off again, and I finally managed to work out what John used and got the Boomerang pedal and the PS-1A phaser missing from my rig."

Is there another pedal that you are looking to add?

"No, I'm not looking for more pedals for this setup. I'm seeking a pedalboard/flightcase like John used in the 70s. I've had quotes for custom and TheGigRig-based pedalboards, but don't want another row of buttons to tap dance on in front of those in my original setup."

What guitars and amps do you use with this board?

"A Guild D-55 NT 1972 with a DeArmond soundhole pickup and a Barcus Berry acoustic pickup inside behind the bridge, and an early Gibson SG Special. My amps are a silverface '68 Fender Twin and two Roland Jazz Chorus JC-120s."

What lessons have you learned along the way?

"Not many modern tape delay or tape echos get close to a real Echoplex EP-2 or an EP-3 tape echo sound. The best I have found is the Strymon El Capistan, and the Xotic EP Booster is great in a modern setup. Most delays just don't produce that organic echo 'magic halo trail'. Do not waste time and money chasing modern replacements for the original gear if you are a tone geek."

Guitar & Bass SHOW US YOUR BOARD

To be in with a chance of seeing your pedalboard in the magazine, email a picture to **guitarandbass@anthem-publishing.com**

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SOUNDTRACK OF MY LIFE

Rich Robinson

Former Black Crowe turned Southern solo artist shares the records closest to his heart

Rich Robinson founded The Black Crowes in 1984 with brother Chris, while still at high school in Atlanta, Georgia. The band went on to release nine studio albums, selling 30 million copies. They toured with acts including ZZ Top, Jimmy Page and Oasis before splitting for a third time in 2013. Robinson formed the bands Hookah Brown and Circle Sound, and has played as a live guitarist in Bad Company, as well as releasing four solo studio albums.

Rich Robinson's solo album, Flux, is released on 24 June on Eagle Rock Entertainment

Crosby, Stills & Nash
DÉJÀ VU

"One of my earliest memories is listening to this album. It seemed to always be on in the house – all those harmonies... I've always been a big fan, and as I got older and started writing songs, I really got into the way they wrote and played, and obviously Neil Young... It's pretty influential all round, and throughout my whole life I've drawn from that record."

Nick Drake
PINK MOON

"A friend of mine early-on worked at a record store and had *Time Of No Reply*, a compilation by Nick Drake. From the first moment I heard it, it drew me in – his voice and the way he played guitar... Once I heard *Pink Moon* it was all over. Everything about that record really moved me and it became a really big influence on my playing in open tunings."

The Rolling Stones
EXILE ON MAIN ST

"*Exile On Main St* is a huge influence. The whole record, there's so much excitement, movement and fun, but also these amazing songs. It all comes down to that human quality of what records were back then. People use computers and Pro Tools to try to cut out the humanity, but what's so great about that record is it's so organic. It lives and breathes."

R.E.M.
MURMUR

"Growing up in the South, we never identified ourself with the Southern rock thing. We were always more alternative-minded, and when I first heard *Radio Free Europe* it really spoke to me. It encompassed something that came from that part of the world that I could relate to. From then on, they were one of our favourite bands."

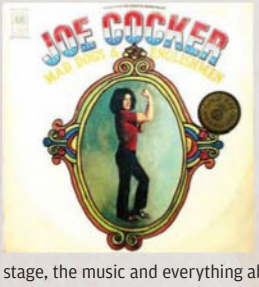
Van Morrison
ASTRAL WEEKS

"To me, this is a masterpiece, and again it's down to that human quality. It's all over the place, and it's so intricate; there are so many subtle movements. The way the drums gently come in on *Sweet Thing*... there's a snare hit and then the drums are there. I still listen to it almost every day. When I'm on tour, I'll always put it on. It's one of my all-time favourite records."

Led Zeppelin
LED ZEPPELIN III

"All the Zeppelin records are amazing, but *III* was such an interesting record for them to make. You have the first two albums with huge guitars, and then *III* came out – it was so layered and organic. It went to this place I didn't expect it to. We did a tour with [Jimmy Page] and just to take apart those songs and see his composition was eye-opening."

Joe Cocker
MAD DOGS & ENGLISHMEN



"Another record that, growing up, was on all the time. I don't even know what you can say about it. The movie to the record... that whole thing, and Leon Russell being such an amazing talent. To have those two together on stage, the music and everything about the record was like a sensory overload. That really is like a once-in-a-lifetime thing."

Bob Dylan
BLOOD ON THE TRACKS

"*Meet Me In The Morning*, *Buckets Of Rain*... I love *Blonde On Blonde*, *The Times They Are A Changin'*, pretty much every record of his, but when I heard this it just hit me. The way it was framed was so different. He was capable of changing without it ever seeming forced. It's like walking down a street and you go down a little alley and you're in the same city but it looks different."

The Band
MUSIC FROM BIG PINK

"When I first heard *Tears Of Rage*... and Robbie Robertson's guitar... that record is another masterpiece I never get tired of listening to. It's almost like a miracle when people get together and write songs in that one moment. The way Rick Danko played bass, I'm a huge fan, and Levon obviously, the whole band – there was nothing that wasn't utilised in the best possible way."

Soul POG

Combines two of our most popular pedals – the Soul Food transparent overdrive and Nano POG Polyphonic Octave Generator – in one potent multi-effect. Use them alone or together, put either first in the chain, insert other pedals between them with the FX loop. Also includes a cool Mode switch for a choice of two different octave-up sounds. The versatile Soul POG delivers award-winning overdrive and flawless polyphonic octaves in any combination.

A faithful reissue of the cult-classic released in 1979, the SSD uses analog synthesis techniques to create mind-blowing sounds ranging from deep kicks to high toms to sci-fi drums. Trigger it from the built-in pushbutton or an external (non-MIDI) electronic drum pad. Pass external sounds through the gated amplifier via the aux input. The Super Space Drum lets you create, control and manipulate a stunning array of synthesized sounds.

Like the 1980's original, this new version creates drum sounds ranging from cymbals to snares to other-worldly oscillation sweeps, and can process external sounds thru its resonant filter. It's triggered via the built-in pushbutton or an external (non-MIDI) drum pad. It also responds to expression pedal/CV input for external control over the filter in real-time. The Crash Pad is very cool by itself, but also works especially well with our Clockworks Rhythm Generator and 8 Step Program.

Bass guitars possess a huge dynamic range and produce powerful low frequencies. Designed for and by bassists, this compact compressor/sustainer features fully adjustable controls that can subtly transform the dynamic qualities of a bass guitar or take them to the extreme. From transparently leveling out notes so they sit in a track to creating an intensely squashed sound, the Bass Preacher helps spread the gospel of great bass tone!

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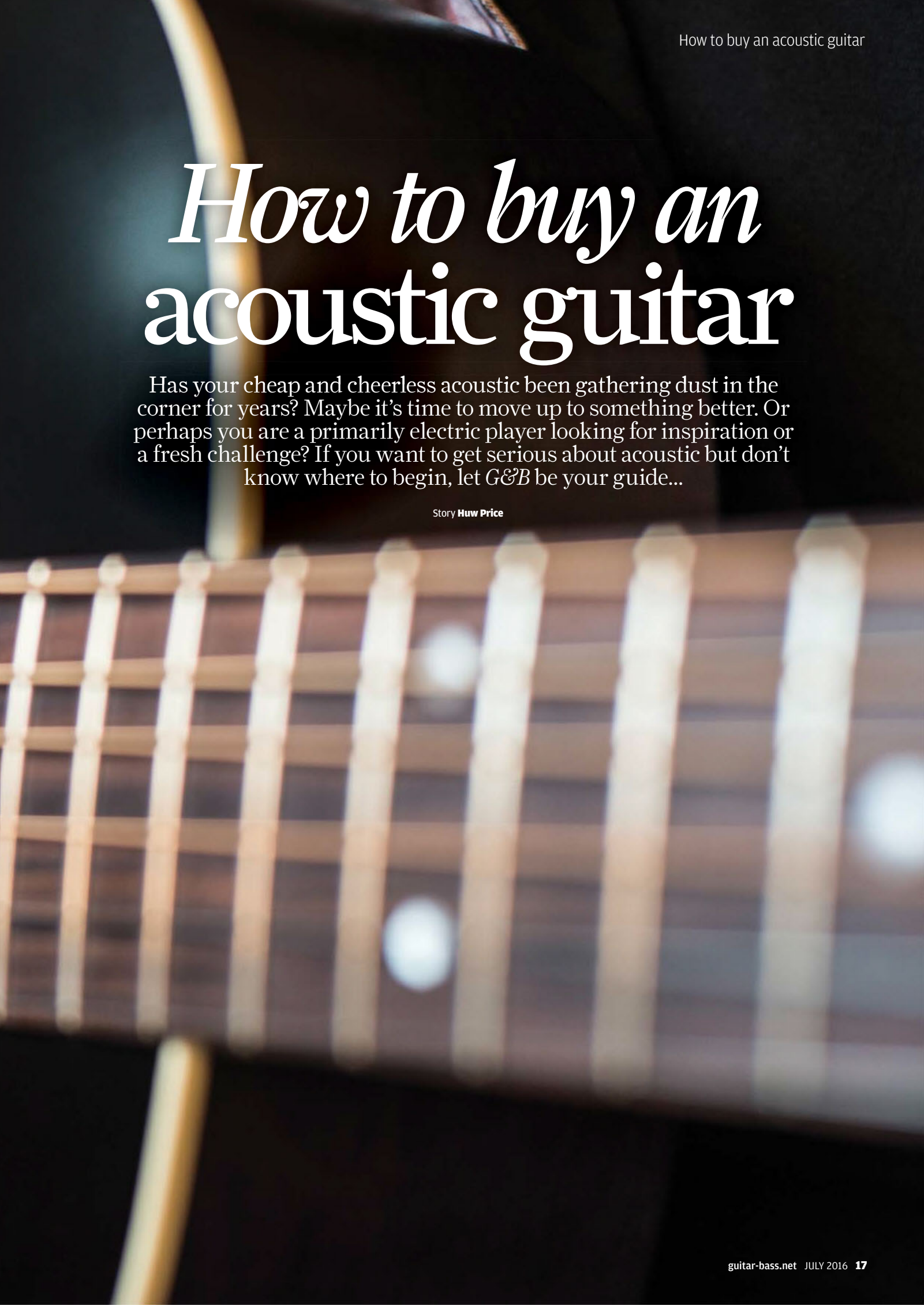
How to buy an acoustic guitar

Has your cheap and cheerless acoustic been gathering dust in the corner for years? Maybe it's time to move up to something better. Or perhaps you are a primarily electric player looking for inspiration or a fresh challenge? If you want to get serious about acoustic but don't know where to begin, let *G&B* be your guide...

Story **Huw Price**



While many of us are content to play guitars from the same five or six electric models that have been around since before we were born, the acoustic market can be a crowded and confusing place. You have to consider shape, size, tonewoods, neck dimensions, pickup systems and plenty more besides if you want the sound, feel and looks that are right for you. Let us begin at the beginning...

Tonewoods

Acoustic guitar bodies can be made from solid wood or laminates. If you're interested primarily in an electro-acoustic that won't feed back at high volume, the reduced resonance of a fully laminated body may prove advantageous.

There are also high-end builders who maintain that laminated sides are superior because they won't split along the grain, and they decouple the front from the back more effectively to improve tone. Guitars combining solid tops and backs with laminated sides can give you all-solid tone at a lower price point.

There have also been notable acoustics made with solid tops and laminated backs and sides. For instance, Guild can hold its own with any other brand, but historically the company preferred arched plywood backs, which are more reminiscent of jazzboxes rather than flat tops.

Even so, the consensus is that all-solid acoustics represent the pinnacle. You'll pay extra because the materials cost more, but the resulting tone is generally held to be superior. Of course, all these tone timbers have their own distinct sound, so to simplify matters we'll discuss tops separately from the backs and sides.

Spruce is by far the most commonly used soundboard wood, followed by cedar and mahogany. During the great depression, mahogany was used – and its current revival seems apt. Of late, we have also encountered redwood, koa and jatoba tops.

Although spruce comes in many varieties, it's the brightest top wood with the most complex harmonic overtones. Time and regular use also tends to improve spruce as it mellows and frees up. In contrast, cedar has a sweet and warm 'played in' tone from the get-go, but it's not as bright. Cedar is used for classical guitars and also works superbly on Lowden-style jumbos. Mahogany, koa and jatoba have fewer harmonic overtones, emphasising the midrange woodiness and lending the guitars a retro charm.

Commonly used back and side woods include mahogany, rosewood, maple, walnut, koa and many others. These can be broken down into sub-varieties that all have certain tonal characteristics. We could say that mahogany has a dry woody brightness and rosewood is more complex with deeper lows and more shimmery highs, but these generalisations can be misleading.

Rosewood can sound boomy on a dreadnought, but it helps fill out the low end on a smaller-bodied guitar. Similarly, a naturally bright wood such as maple can keep a jumbo tight and focused, or make a small-bodied guitar clangy and metallic in a bluesy way. Much depends on the bracing and the skill of the luthier to achieve the best results from the materials in question.

Spruce is by far the most commonly used soundboard wood, followed by cedar and mahogany

The bottom line is that two identically spec'd guitars from different manufacturers might sound completely different. In fact, two identically spec'd guitars from the same manufacturer can sound very different. Acoustic guitars are highly complex instruments, and there will always be a degree of unpredictability when natural materials are involved. That's what makes all of this so much fun.

Body styles

At the risk of oversimplifying the issue, volume and projection were the driving forces in the evolution of the acoustic guitar. European parlor guitars that were used to accompany singers in intimate settings developed into the concert instruments of the classical stage and ensemble instruments of country and jazz bands.

Although there was plenty going on under the surface, with various bracing patterns and so forth, the most obvious change has been the gradual increase in body size. A soundboard with a larger surface area can generate more sound waves and the extra capacity of the body helps to bolster the bass.

Since onboard pickup systems have become practical and affordable, size is no longer a prerequisite for being heard. Consequently, smaller-bodied acoustics have been enjoying a revival, and nowadays the variations in body shape and size are almost infinite. Even so, old Martin model designations are still widely used to differentiate, regardless of the manufacturer, so we'll stick with convention for this rough guide.

Parlor (aka size 2 and size 1)

Parlor guitars may be the babies of the steel-string family in terms of size, but they're also the oldest. Most modern manufacturers include a parlor or two in their product lists, but don't expect the natural acoustic tone to generate that much bass or volume. A decent parlor should have sweet, harp-like treble and a clear midrange, making them ideal for fingerstylists; they're also popular with blues, bottleneck and ragtime pickers. The maximum size probably won't exceed 13 inches across the lower bout.

0 & 00

Martin introduced the size 0 in 1854 and the 00 followed 23 years later. The 0 was 13 1/2 inches wide, and Gibson's L-0 and L-1 used the same body width between 1926 and 1931. This size provided a fuller bass response than the parlors.

Robert Johnson is reputed to have played a 1928 L-1 and Gibson later introduced a signature model. A much earlier signature model, the Nick Lucas, also measured 13 1/2 inches wide, and it's most famous as the model Bob Dylan used for his *Another Side Of Bob Dylan* and *Bringing It All Back Home* albums.

The 00 increased from 14 1/8 inches wide to 14 5/16 for

Opposite page **An 1874 Martin Style 40 parlor guitar with ornate pearl trim**

the 14-fret version. Dylan played a 12-fret 0042 on his albums *Blood On The Tracks* and *Desire*, and Steve Howe played a 14-fret 0018 with Yes and Asia.

000/OM

It could be said that the 12-fret 000 was the last of Martin's 'traditional' guitars and the 14-fret OM was the first of the modern ones. Both measured 15 inches across, but the 12- and 14-fret 000s had the shorter 24.9-inch scale length.

It's interesting to note how the 14-fret Martins came to be. In 1929, banjoist Perry Bechtel requested a large-bodied 14-fret flat top guitar and the factory simply bent the shoulders a little tighter to shorten the body. Since banjos have scale lengths of 26 inches or more, Martin increased the scale length to 25.4 inches and gave the new design the designation Orchestra Model – or OM.

Almost immediately after this, 14-fret necks of both scale lengths became the Martin standard, and a solid headstock replaced the slotted design. Many people consider 000s and OMs the best all-round acoustic guitars – they're good for fingerstyle and strumming, with deep but tightly controlled bass and ample volume. Brit folkies Martin Carthy and Richard Thompson have both used 00018s, while Eric Clapton favours the 00028.

Dreadnought

Many people credit Martin for producing the first dreadnought-style guitar, but Lyon & Healy has a pretty good claim too. In its 1912 catalogue was a Lakeside Jumbo steel-string measuring 16 1/4 inches across. During 1916, Martin subsequently made a small number of very similar guitars exclusively for Ditson. This 12-fret model was recognisably a dreadnought, but Martin only started making the model under its own name in 1931. Although only 5/8-inch wider than an 000, the reduced waist added considerably to the body capacity.

In 1934, the model lost its sloped shoulders and slotted headstock when a 14th-fret neck join was >

Buying Used

What are the most important things to look for when buying a second-hand acoustic?

If you're going to take the plunge and enter the second-hand market for your next acoustic, there are some important factors to watch out for.

You can decide for yourself about the usual dents and dings, but cracks and splits are a matter for greater concern. Look at the area behind the bridge to see if the centre seam has started to separate. With anything other than a vintage collectable, that's the point at which you should walk away.

Look for cracks in the sides and on the front and back. If they are fairly tight and short, they can probably be fixed, but cleats will be needed to stop them spreading further. Also ensure the guitar is tuned to concert pitch and look across the top in the area behind the bridge. If it has 'bellied up' noticeably and the bridge is tilting towards the neck, it might be worth having it checked by a luthier before committing to buy.

Check for gaps where the neck joins the body, especially at the bottom of the heel – a gap might indicate that the neck will need a reset. If the string action is high but the saddle is cut low, you can take it as confirmation that something isn't right.

As always, sight along the neck to see if it has twisted, and while you're at it, check that the truss rod is functioning. Don't forget to check for gaps between the rear of the bridge and the body. Gaps indicate that the bridge has started to lift off and it will need to be removed, cleaned and re-glued.

String Theory

Changing strings is the acoustic equivalent of swapping pickups, so profound are the tonal differences...

There are various alloys, gauges, cores and coatings to choose from when selecting strings, and they have profound effects on tone and feel.

In the acoustic world, a 10-gauge top E constitutes extra light. Most players choose 12- or 13-gauge sets, and anything above is regarded as heavy. Heavier strings sound fuller and louder, but they will be harder to play. Thinner strings have a lighter and thinner tone and they'll play easily. You may also find that balanced tension sets have a more even string-to-string response.

Heavy strings are unsuitable for vintage-style acoustics with scalloped bracing because they can cause the top to belly up, and may cause structural damage to the guitar. Light strings may be unable to drive a heavily-built guitar sufficiently for it to sound good.

Your playing style, too, may dictate your choice, with heavier strings providing a more powerful rhythm tone for strummers and medium-gauge strings having a more complex and open sound for fingerpicking.

Bronze strings can sound bright when new, but they age quickly and a dull thuddiness can set in. Phosphor bronze strings are bright, too, and longer lasting, plus they have a warmer woodiness. Those who don't like bright acoustic tones might consider monel alloy strings, such as Martin Retros, and for really old-school parlor and small-body tones check out Silk & Steels.

Modern strings are wound onto a hexagonally shaped core, but vintage-style strings are available with round cores, and they work really well with 12-fretters and vintage guitars. Check out the Newtone Master Class and low-tension Heritage Series.

If you play a lot and find that you deaden strings quickly, coated strings may help to preserve your tone and bank balance. Various manufacturers offer them, with Elixir being a popular choice.

adopted. The width remained the same but the depth was increased to compensate for the shortened body. This is the dreadnought design that remains with us today, and it has undoubtedly been the most popular acoustic model of them all.

Its sound is characterised by a deep punchy bass and plenty of volume. The midrange can be scooped, but dreadnoughts are ideal for guitarists who need a powerful rhythm instrument that can also handle fingerpicking and flat picking. Dreadnoughts have been the model of choice for bluegrass players such as Doc Watson and Clarence White, while most of Stephen Stills' and Neil Young's best acoustic work was recorded with dreadnoughts, and fingerstylist Bert Jansch used one almost exclusively in later years.

Jumbo

The jumbo is the only model designation not associated with Martin. To learn more about the earliest jumbos, check out the intimidating Lyon & Healy Monster Bass and the Larson Brothers' Prairie State.

The Gibson J-200 typifies the Jumbo's hourglass figure. At 17 inches wide and 4 7/8-inch deep, the J-200 was popular with country players and rockers such as Jimmy Page and Pete Townshend for its big and punchy tone with plenty of high-frequency cut.

Gibson also made a number of smaller jumbos, such as the 16-inch wide J-185 and the Everly Brothers model.

The muscular tone of Guild's 17-inch wide F-50 and the 16-inch F-40 jumbos attracted players such as Richie Havens and Tim Buckley. In recent years, George Lowden has added his own twist to the jumbo formula with an 'A' frame bracing pattern that works really well for folkies – especially those who play in dropped open tunings and use a modern percussive style.

Neck dimensions

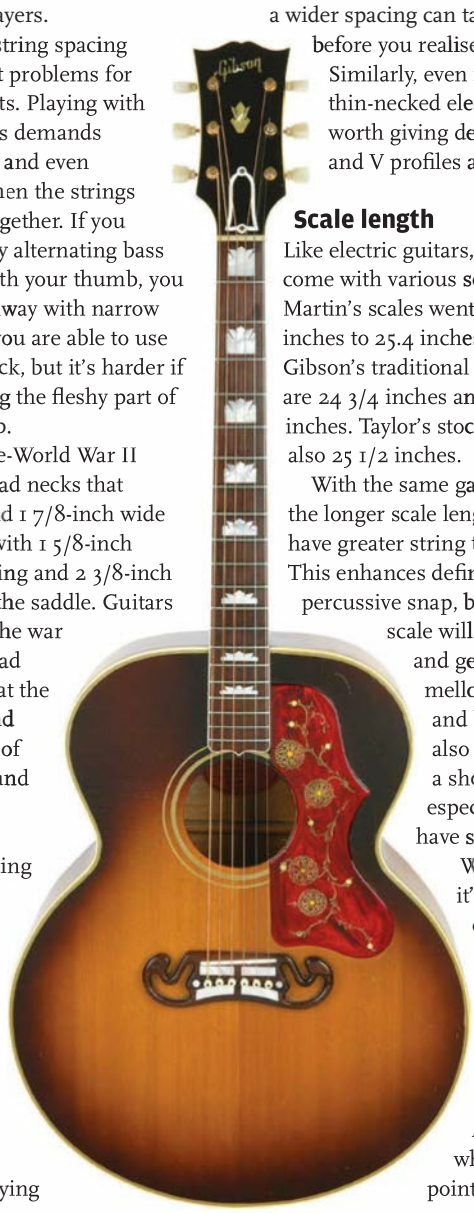
There has been a trend over recent years to make acoustic guitars feel more like electric guitars. Necks have been getting thinner, fingerboards more curved and string spacing narrower. All this is ideal for the electric player who needs only to bash out an acoustic number now and again. However, some of the features that make

things easier for electric players can be a hindrance for dedicated acoustic players.

Narrow string spacing can present problems for fingerstylists. Playing with your fingers demands precision – and even more so when the strings are close together. If you want to play alternating bass patterns with your thumb, you might get away with narrow spacing if you are able to use a thumb pick, but it's harder if you're using the fleshy part of your thumb.

Many pre-World War II acoustics had necks that were around 1 7/8-inch wide at the nut with 1 5/8-inch string spacing and 2 3/8-inch spacing at the saddle. Guitars built after the war generally had neck joins at the 14th fret and nut widths of 1 3/4-inch and 1 11/16-inch, with corresponding 1 1/2-inch and 1 7/16-inch spacing becoming typical.

To figure out what works for you, try playing a lot of guitars. Avoid making snap judgments, because adjusting to a wider spacing can take a while before you realise the benefits. Similarly, even if you like thin-necked electrics, it's worth giving deeper necks and V profiles a chance.



Scale length

Like electric guitars, acoustics come with various scale lengths. Martin's scales went from 24.9 inches to 25.4 inches, while Gibson's traditional scale lengths are 24 3/4 inches and 25 1/2 inches. Taylor's stock length is also 25 1/2 inches.

With the same gauge strings, the longer scale length will have greater string tension. This enhances definition and percussive snap, but a shorter scale will feel looser and generally sound mellower. Stretches and bending will also be easier with a shorter scale, especially if you have smaller hands.

Whenever it's a trade-off between playability and tone, playability should always take precedence. After all, what's the point in having a wonderful-sounding guitar if you can't play the bloody thing?

12 or 14 frets?

The obvious advantage of a 14th-fret neck join is easy access to those two frets above the octave. It may not sound like much, but there's a lot you can do up there, and you won't need to contort your hand when playing slide. Most players find 14-fretters more versatile than the older-style 12-fretters. If you need even more upper-fret access, there's not exactly a shortage of cutaway models available.

Having said that, 12-fretters are known for a grander and harmonically-rich mellowness with a discernibly old-school vibe that lends itself to blues and traditional fingerstyle playing. These qualities are attributed to the longer body, shifted bracing and a positioning of the bridge where the body is wider.

Electro-acoustics

An electro-acoustic is an acoustic guitar with a factory-installed pickup system. There are plenty of excellent electros these days, but pitfalls for the inexperienced remain, particularly at the budget end of the market. If funds are limited, we'd recommend opting for the best-sounding acoustic guitar your budget will buy. Priotitise acoustic tone and playing feel. Most of the time, you'll be playing unplugged anyway, so you'll get more enjoyment out of the guitar.

When you do need to amplify, the good news is that pickup >

Opposite page **A 1931 Martin OM-28 Orchestra Model, perhaps the ultimate all-rounder**
Above **This 1924 Martin-made Ditson was one of the earliest dreadnoughts**
Left **A 1957 Gibson J-200, or to give it its full name, the Super Jumbo 200. If you want to make a statement with your choice of stage acoustic, this is it**
Next page **The Martin D-28 is an American icon. This 1941 example is a beauty**

Can't Get No Torrefaction?

The acoustic market's biggest buzzword of recent times explained...

Whether it's referred to as baking, roasting, torrefaction or something else entirely, essentially what we're talking about is using heat to modify the properties of wood. When it comes to timber, the Scandinavians know a thing or two, and though the commercial torrefaction of wood has been carried out by our friends in the north since the 1930s, many centuries earlier Viking ship builders treated wood with fire to give it better protection against the elements.

What torrefaction means for guitar manufacture is an acceleration of the drying process that happens over time. On a cellular level, the cellulose is crystalised, much of the hemicellulose is burned away, and the lignin is softened and redistributed. Providing it isn't overcooked, the wood will become less susceptible to movement caused by moisture changes and benefit from an increase in cross-grain stiffness and a reduction in weight. It'll also take on a darker, richer appearance.

"High temperature seasoning isn't the ultimate answer for making a great instrument," argues Taylor's master luthier Andy Powers, though he acknowledges that "It is a technique which can be used by the maker to prepare some materials to achieve specific characteristics, in the same way a chef may sear one ingredient and simmer another. Ultimately, a good craftsman forms a relationship with the material they are using, and asks it to do what it does best.

"A significant part of creating an instrument is choosing the right ingredients for each individual component. The next step is to best prepare those ingredients so they can perform their role in the orchestra of a completed guitar. For some materials and designs, this can be high-temperature seasoning. For others, this means lower temperatures and the slow passing of seasons."

Our own experiences of playing instruments made with heat-seasoned timber have been wholly positive, both in terms of the sonic and aesthetic effects. Try one, you might like it!

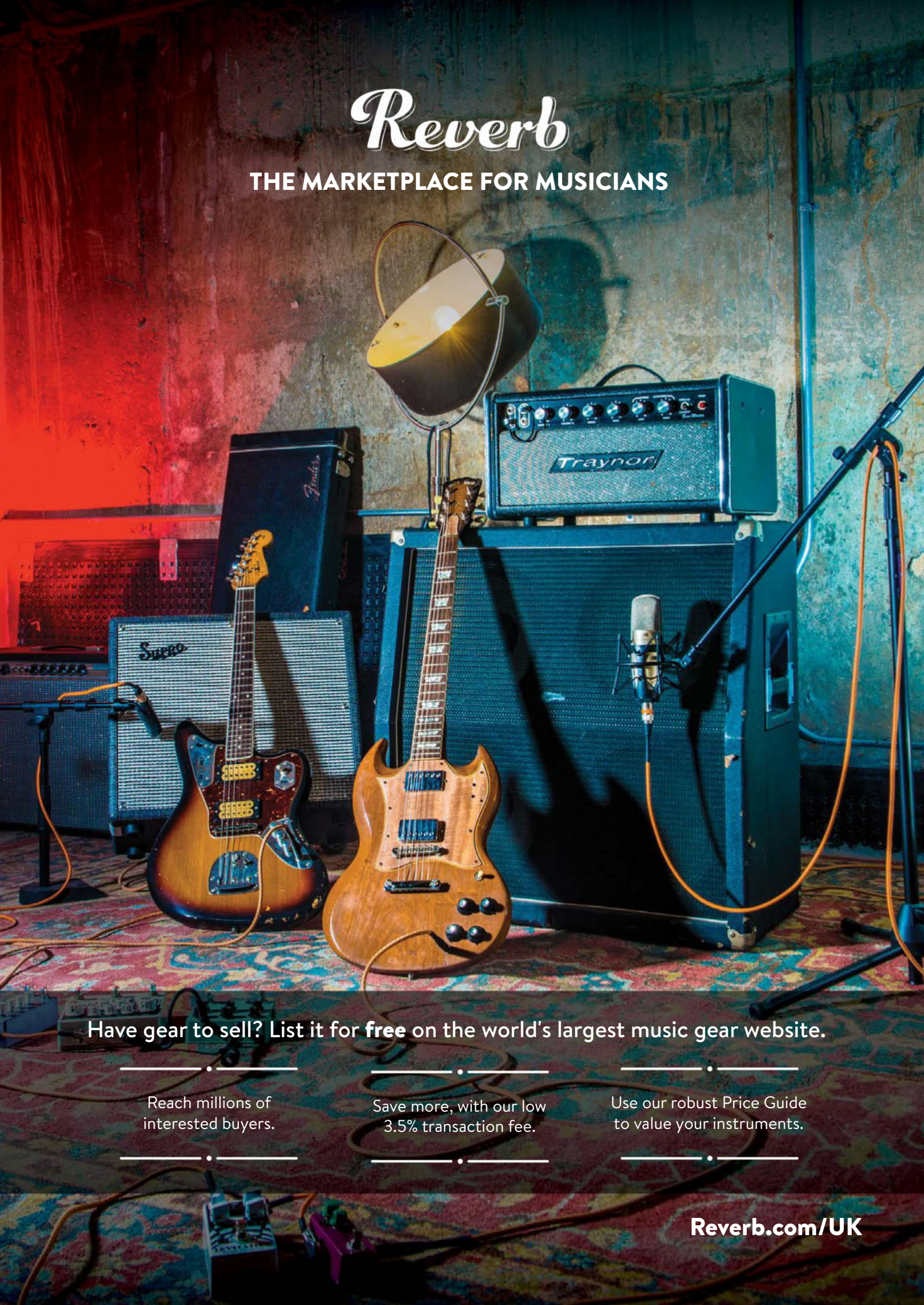
systems have never been better. While no pickup system will replicate your acoustic tone with absolute fidelity, things have come a long way since the days of squark-y undersaddle piezos and primitive magnetic soundhole pickups. Piezo systems have improved dramatically and specialist manufacturers are making magnetic soundhole pickups that retain more 'acoustic' tonality. You can even get systems with internal microphones that can be used alone or in combination with soundhole or undersaddle pickups.

You can opt for simple tone and volume controls that sit discreetly under the soundhole, or you may prefer fully-featured preamps with notch filtering, phase switching, powerful equalisation and even integral tuners. All that said, if you can afford a high-quality electro-acoustic, there are advantages in buying one off the shelf. First and foremost, you'll be able to test how the guitar sounds, both plugged in and unplugged. You'll also save yourself the cost of having a luthier install a pickup system, and new guitars generally come with some sort of warranty.

When buying an acoustic, do your research and draw up a wish list. Ask yourself if you really need a pickup system and, if so, can you afford an amplifier? If you intend to play unplugged, is it worth prioritising a solid top, or maybe even all-solid construction? If you struggle to play fingerstyle on your electric, it won't get any easier if your acoustic has identical string spacing. So try a wider and flatter neck, and give yourself a chance to get used to it before making a final decision.

Examine the finish closely – don't be seduced by dead flat gloss, especially if you can see build-up along the fingerboard and neck join. A thick plastic finish acts like a straightjacket. Similarly, fancy inlays and bindings do nothing to improve tone, so beware of bling.

Although we can make general observations about tonewoods and body sizes, playing it yourself is the only way to tell how a guitar sounds and feels. For this reason, we would point out that it's very risky to buy an acoustic without trying it first. If you get it wrong, you won't be able to fix it with a re-spray and a new set of pickups. But if you choose wisely, a great acoustic will be your friend for life.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Chord Clinic

Summer evenings, sat around the campfire or under the stars at a festival are the perfect time to break out an acoustic. **ROD FOGG** introduces some ideal chord patterns and open-tunings...

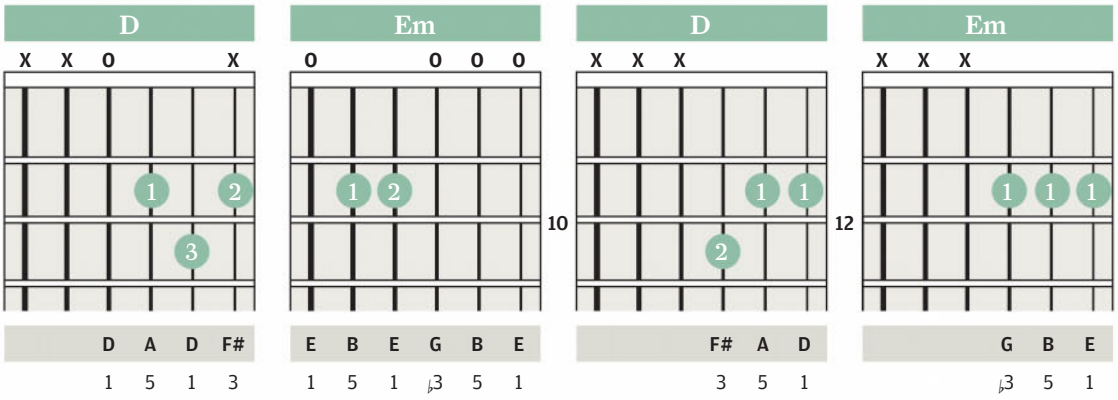
Summer's here and the time is right for... dancing in the street. Or should that be fighting in the street? Well, regardless of whether you are a devotee of Martha Reeves or Mick Jagger, here at *G&B* we think summer is the ideal time to strap on an acoustic guitar and play some classic summer tunes, and while you're at it, experiment with some open-string tunings.

Starting with some easy stuff, bashing out two bars each of D and E minor will give you a feel similar to *Alright* by Supergrass, a summer anthem if ever there was one. Taking inspiration from the above pattern, it might be nice to get together with a mate and add some high stabs on beats two and four to further ape this kind of summery vibe, using some of the shapes in figure 1. These high chords are triads, consisting of just the root, third and fifth that make up the basic major or minor chord. Play each chord with a downstroke and immediately release the pressure from your fretting-hand fingers, but don't take them off the strings completely so that the sound is cut abruptly.

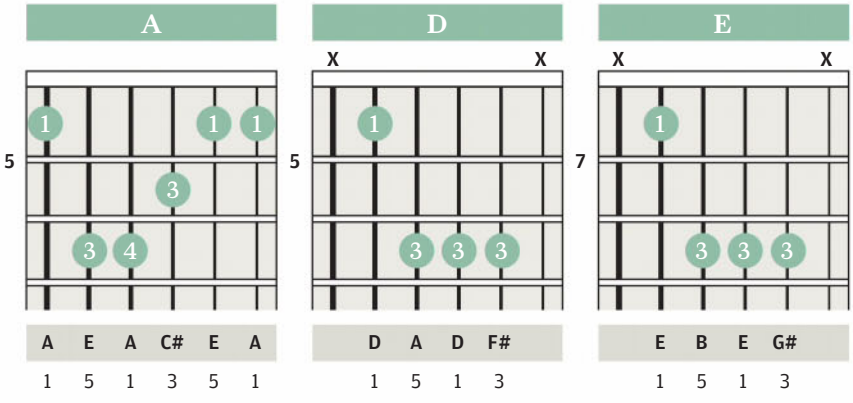
Staying with beats two and four for a while, reggae, and the sound of Bob Marley in particular, is always perfect for kicking back on a hot summer day. Of course, if you are reading this while enduring the pouring rain of an unpredictable British summer then maybe a touch of Jamaica will brighten things up for you. To play reggae, barre chords are preferred to open-string chords because after each downstroke on beats two and four we need to release the pressure from the fret-hand fingers to stop the sound and once again achieve that shortened 'stab', or 'chop' as it's often called. The three chords in figure 2 also appear in *Three Little Birds*, which is probably better known by its "don't worry about a thing" chorus. These are movable chords in the key of A; take them two frets higher in pitch to the key of B, (to give you B, E and F#) and you have a feel similar to another Marley favourite, *One Love*.

Returning to open-string chords for a moment, they can sound more interesting if you place them over a moving bassline in the style of figure 3. The second chord is a 'slash chord', where we use a forward slash to specify a particular bass note for a chord. We would call it G with B. The other, normally written, chords are in root position, meaning they have the root note in the bass. You can use a pick on chord sequences such as these, but fingerpicking allows you to separate out

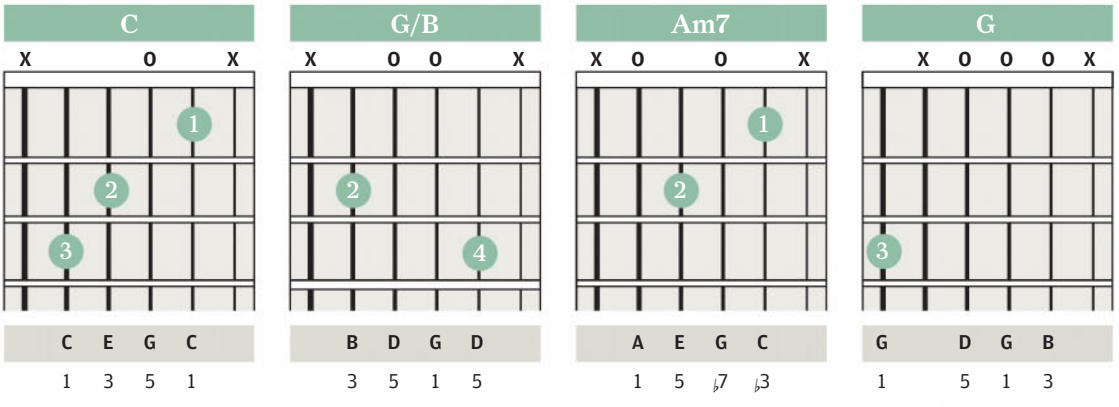
Summer anthem (Fig 1)



Jamaican chops (Fig 2)



Feeling basslines (Fig 3)



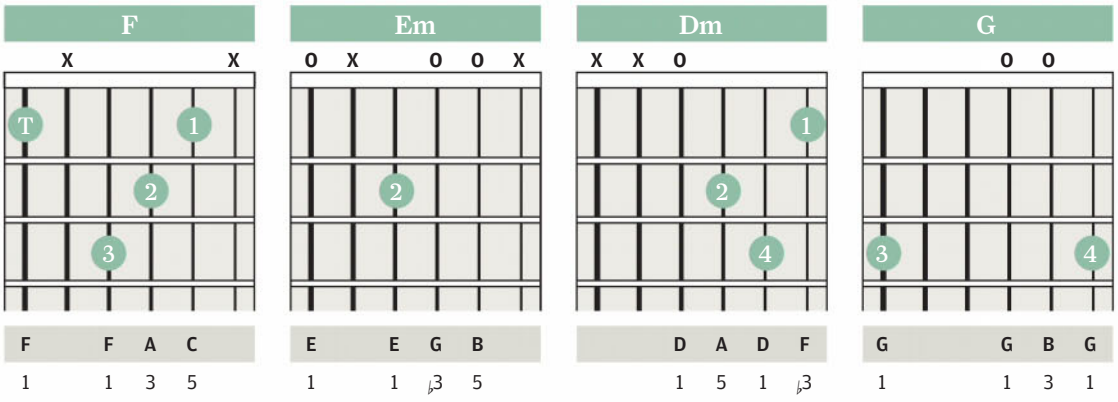
the bassline with your thumb, and spreading the other notes of each chord among the fingers can keep things grooving along nicely. Try playing the D string with your index finger, the G string with your middle finger and the B string with your ring finger. Ideally, we are aiming for two chords per bar, and should you find yourself feeling groovy, you could try playing the pattern with a capo at the fifth fret, which would shift the key from C major to F major.

Figure 4 explores some more of the possibilities of this descending bassline, adding to the chords in figure 3; the F major chord will come in handy if you are trying to work out how to play something in the style of *No Woman No Cry*. You'll need to put a capo across the first fret to get the right feel, which will have the hidden benefit of making the F barre chord easier to hold down.

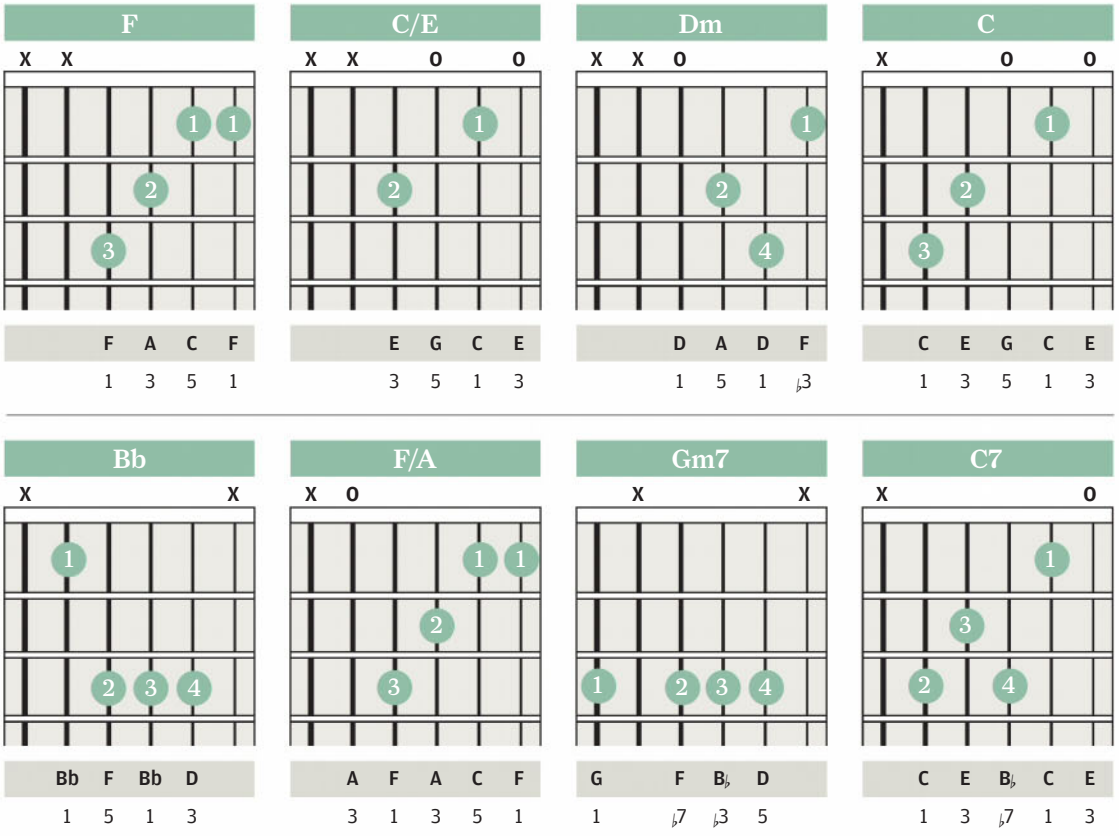
You can replace the G/B with a straight G chord – capo at the first fret again – as Noel Gallagher did on *Don't Look Back In Anger*, for a different kind of powerful bassline, which moves mostly in leaps of a fourth.

Playing the same chord sequence in the key of F without the capo means that you can carry on with the descending bassline all the way down to G on the third fret of the low E string, under a G minor 7 chord. Adding a C7 chord at the end makes the sequence loop around nicely, covering four bars if played two chords to a bar. Again, stick to fingerpicking >

No woman no capo (Fig 4)



Hawaii in F (Fig 5)



this one, but this time try it with the bass notes played with your thumb, and then an up, down, up movement – strumming with the index finger. This particular chord sequence was inspired by *Better Together* by Jack Johnson, another artist who seems to have the heat of summer pulsing through the veins of his music, possibly due to his Hawaiian origins.

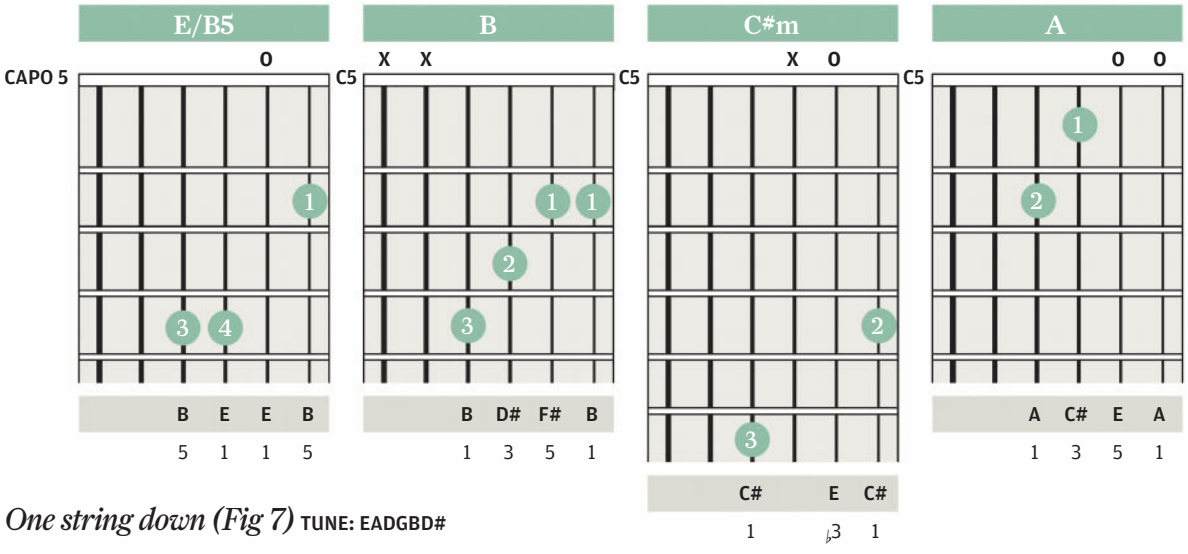
Talking about Hawaii, it is a place which has a long and deep musical tradition, often centred around instruments that are unique to the islands. Some day, we are going to do a Chord Clinic on Hawaiian slack key guitar tunings, but for now, consider the ukulele. With its four strings and unusual tuning, it's sometimes mistakenly thought of as some kind of poor man's guitar – when in fact it is an original instrument with its own separate history, that has become popular all around the world.

You can do a fair impersonation of a ukulele on the guitar by placing a capo at the fifth fret and playing chord voicings that use only the top four strings. Under the capo, these four strings would be, from low to high, G, C, E and A. On the ukulele, the G is tuned an octave higher than on the guitar – hence the odd tuning, which is technically called re-entrant tuning, because the pitches of the strings do not progress logically across the instrument from high to low.

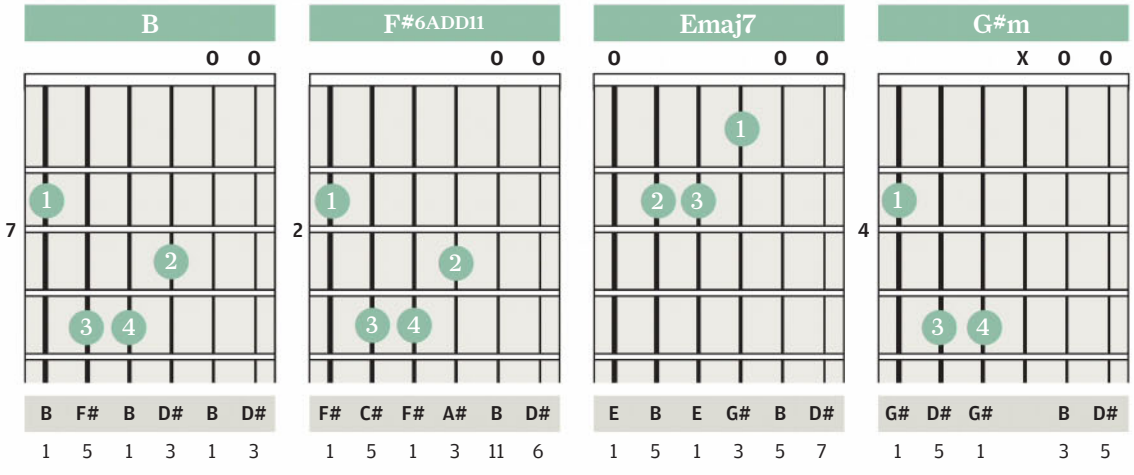
We are not going to try to duplicate re-entrant tuning on a six-string, but if you want to, remove the D string and replace it with a fat E string. Tune the string to D an octave higher than usual (if you play this D string at the second fret it should be at the same pitch as your open E string). Should you ever find

yourself handed a ukulele to play, all of your regular open-string shapes will work as long as you imagine it is a guitar without the two thickest strings, and you allow for the fact that it is tuned a fourth higher than the guitar. For example, if you play a C shape you start on the root note as 'one' and count up four letters – C, D, E, F, meaning that a C shape will produce an F chord. For a G shape, G, A, B, C means a G shape makes a C chord. So, for example, a C shape produces an F chord and a G shape produces a C chord. For our next exercise, we were inspired by Train's *Hey, Soul Sister*, along with many other songs that use chords I, V, VI and IV to produce a standard four-chord sequence in the key of E. Notice we are starting on a slightly unusual E chord – it has no major third and so is called E5. Strum these chords using up and downstrokes of your index finger for an authentic ukulele sound. Mute the fifth string by touching it

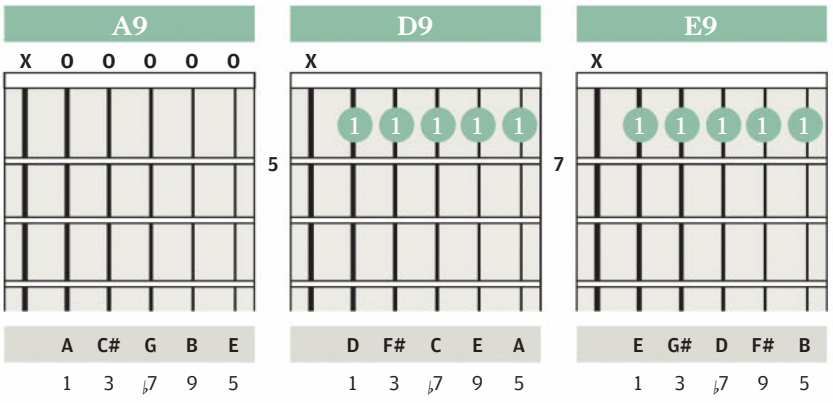
Ukulele impersonator (Fig 6) CAPO 5TH FRET



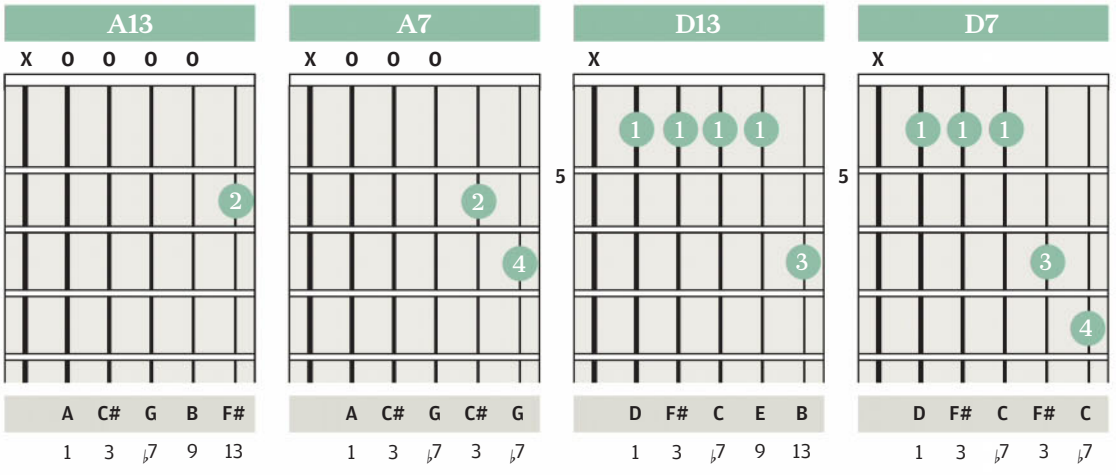
One string down (Fig 7) TUNE: EADGBD♯



Easy ninth (Fig 8) **TUNE: EAC#GBE**



Easy ninth ideas (Fig 9) **TUNE: EAC#GBE**



lightly with whichever finger is on the fourth string, just in case, but try to confine your strumming to just the top four strings.

Open goal

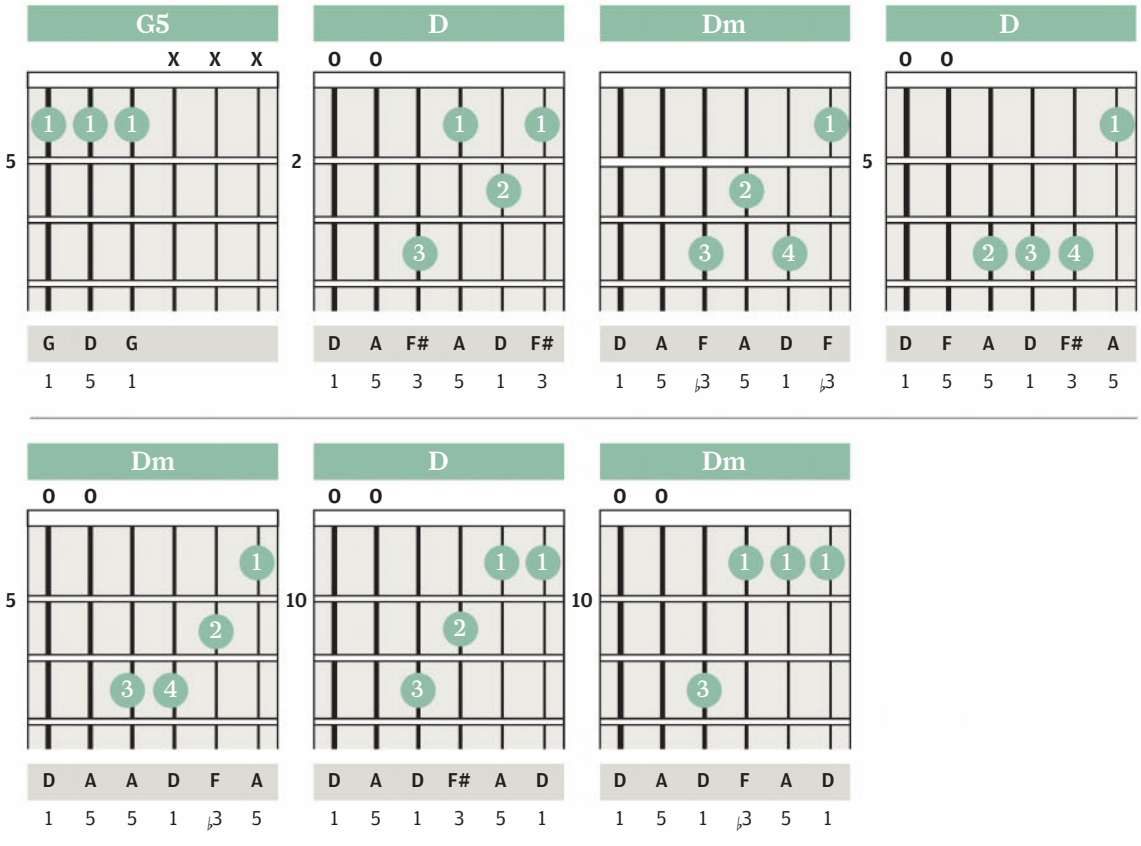
Experimenting with open-string tunings can be a quick and easy way to add some interesting colours to straightforward and easy-to-finger chords. There are many alternative tunings that have become standardised and are now reasonably commonplace, including drop D (DADGBE), DADGAD (self explanatory), open G (DGDGBD) and open D (DADF#AD). Note that tunings are always written from lowest pitch to highest. All these tunings will work well on a standard steel-string guitar, providing the strings are not too light. As they mostly involve lowering the pitch of the strings, there is little chance of the string breaking because of the change in tension.

For the next few examples, we've decided to think outside the box and find some tunings that alter only one string. For figure 7, it's the top E string, and you need to lower it one semitone, or half step, to D#. Sound the fourth fret of the B string to get a reference pitch. At first sight, this modification might not seem to be particularly useful, but it turns out to be something of a masterstroke for playing in the key of B major. Not only do you get a drony B major chord by leaving the top two strings open, there's also a crunchy F#6add11, with the 11th clashing nicely with the major third. The E major 7 and G# minor 7 chords are unusually resonant (be careful to mute the open G string with finger 4 for that last one), and who would have thought you could get such a cool-sounding C#9 up there at the ninth fret? The final chord, C minor maj7, can be something of an acquired taste, but it shows some of the possibilities of changing just one string. Seek out Coldplay's *Yellow* for inspiration.

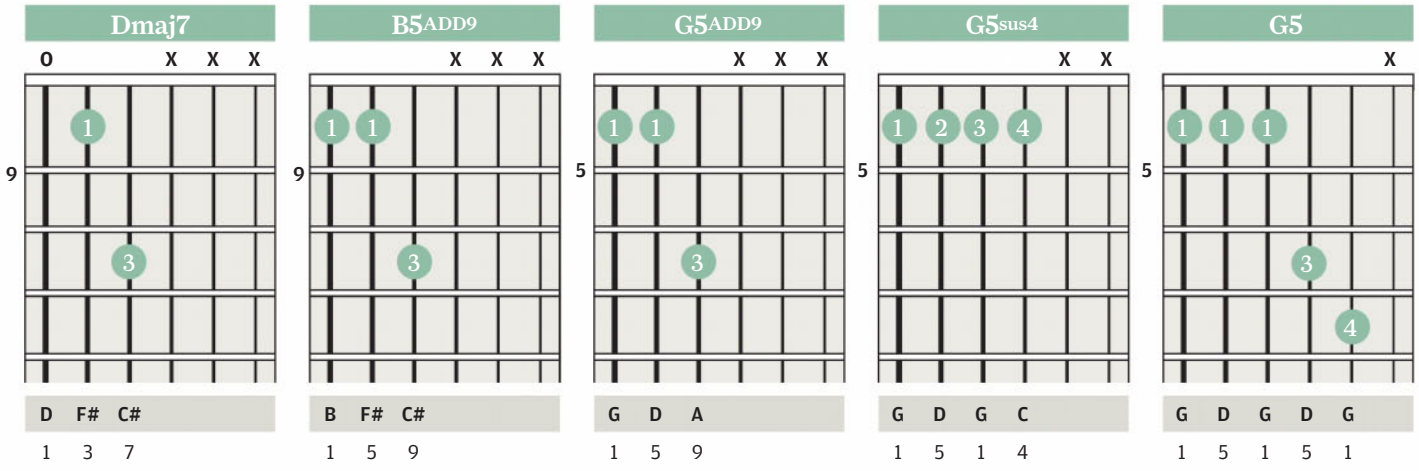
For the next example, you need to return your E string to its normal pitch and then grab the D string tuner and lower that string to C#. You can find the reference pitch at the fourth fret on the A string. From now on, you are going to play just the five highest strings of the guitar, which, with this modified tuning, now produces a ninth chord. Ninth chords are great for playing the blues, and that's why at this stage we have sketched out only three chords: A9, D9 and E9, which will give you a blues in A. Strum it, pick it, slap it, try to add a bassline, rock 'n' roll style... the possibilities are endless and you only need one finger stretched out across five strings. Use the tip of your finger to mute the sixth string, or alternatively hold it down and use it to provide an alternating bassline played with your thumb (the note on the sixth string is the fifth of the chord, so you can alternate between the root and fifth with a country-style bassline).

Because you have a ninth chord being played with just one finger, you have three fingers available for developing some other ideas. Staying with the blues for a moment, figure 9 adds the sixth and seventh to each chord. The idea is that you play A9, A13, A7, A13 in each bar, one chord per beat, or perhaps stretched out over two bars. Repeat the pattern for the D and E chords and work your way around a 12-bar blues in A. Of course, because the barre chords are movable you can play in any key – C, starting at the

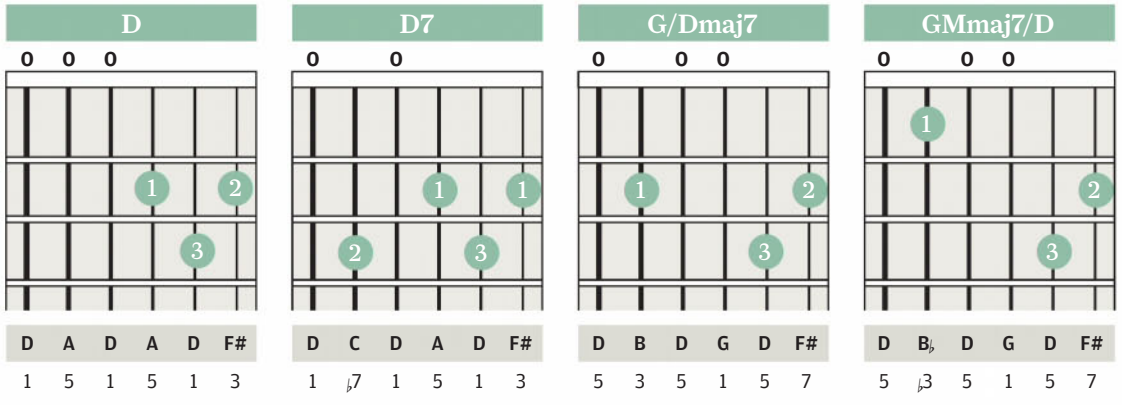
Five and more (Fig 10) DROP D TUNING



Drop D with interest (Fig 11)



Prudent picking (Fig 12) DROP D



third fret and then progressing to the eighth and 10th frets for F and G chords, seems to work particularly well.

The most popular 'just change one string' tuning has to be drop D. Metal bands that tune a semitone down from regular tuning naturally tend to use drop C#, or, to really plumb the depths, tune a whole tone down to drop C. In any case, the chord shapes that are available remain the same regardless of the actual overall pitch of the tuning. The ease of playing a one-finger five chord is what makes this tuning appeal to those of a heavy persuasion – we have illustrated G5 at the fifth fret but you can play this shape anywhere you like, sliding it around with relative ease for some heavy riffing, remembering all the while that even Britpop kings Blur used drop D tuning on *Song 2*, albeit emulating American bands such as Pavement and Nirvana in doing so. Another advantage of this tuning is that the top five strings are unchanged, meaning that all those scale shapes you learnt for soloing still fall under the fingers just as well as they did before.

One of the main features of drop D tuning, going beyond five chords, is the availability of some truly massive D major and D minor chords using all six strings – as found in figure 10. We've chosen to keep the lowest two strings open and add four-note chords on strings 1 to 4. This means that you could change the fingering and drop the root note down one fret to produce a major seventh chord or two frets to produce a seventh chord in the way that we have explored in previous Chord Clinics. With the minor shape, you can create a series of D minor seventh chords by lowering the root note two frets. Another option would be to leave the D string open and just play triads on the top three strings, again with the option to modify them to produce various seventh chords. With chord shapes such as these, it can sometimes seem as if drop D tuning has the ability to subtly reorientate the guitar from being an 'E' instrument to a 'D' instrument, because of the resonance and power of the low D string.

Figure 11 introduces some ideas that go beyond five chords, using the open D as a root note. Most of these shapes are movable, and the perfect fifth interval between the lowest two strings is a great foundation for adding ninths or suspensions, so experiment and see if you can find some of your own. We've also included an alternative version of G5, which can be played at any fret and consists of a five-note pile of roots and fifths. Massive! Foo Fighters' *Everlong* inspired some of the chords in this section.

Getting back to what we started with, figure 12 introduces some drop D chords for you to fingerpick. Your thumb should play a four-note pattern: fifth string, fourth string, sixth string, fourth string. Meanwhile, your fingers should play arpeggios on the top three strings – two chords per bar. Dreamy and ethereal, you can while away the summer days with this Lennon-inspired piece...

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Prince

When Prince passed away in April, the world lost a restless innovator and outrageous musical talent. *Guitar & Bass* reflects on his incredible guitar playing...

Story **Michael Stephens** | Photography **Getty Images**

A strange thing happened in the aftermath of Prince Rogers Nelson's untimely death on 21 April 2016. The 'news' started talking about his music. Specialist music critics, devoted fans and musicians of all stripes were long-boggled by Prince's virtuosity and scope, but it seemed it took his death for others in the mainstream media to appreciate his real talents. "And he was a really good guitarist, too, wasn't he..." said one rolling-news anchor, almost as an afterthought. The 'news' had dissected Prince's enigmatic life, rare public utterances, record industry battles and, erm, his haircuts, but even those news talking heads realised, with Prince now gone, all that didn't really matter anymore. What was left was his music. The music wasn't the news, we understand that. But it's a shame it took a tragic event to highlight the most fundamental aspect of Prince's life. Music, after all, was what mattered most to Prince.

Such media 'skewing' is nothing new, of course. In the mainstream media, The Beatles were initially infamous for their hair. Hendrix for his 'wild' stage shows. Kurt Cobain for his personal angst. It's all part of the parcel. >

Prince playing live with Dez Dickerson in Minneapolis in 1979

But in a tribute written for *Vanity Fair* – contradictorily, one of the few print magazines Prince would talk to – journalist Lisa Robinson recalled that, "Whenever I saw Prince, I told him that he was a hugely underrated guitar player. He would smile – that enigmatic, mysterious smile – and say, 'Why don't you write that?'".

I will admit that my *Vanity Fair* magazine archive is incomplete but, at the time of these interviews, I'm not sure the venerated publication talked much about Prince's music at all.

Prince: musician

Of course, with his passing, Prince hyperbole swung wildly. As well as being the otherworldly imp in high heels, he was now "this generation's Mozart" (hey, why not? Prince said *Amadeus* was his favourite movie). The truth, as often, was probably somewhere in the middle.

Music was in Prince's DNA. His father, John Lewis Nelson (stage name, Prince Rogers) and mother, Mattie Shaw, both performed with the Prince Rogers Band.

Prince with one of his Symbol guitars, custom-built by Jerry Auerswald

The young Prince wrote his first song, *Funk Machine*, on his father's piano, aged just seven. It's been claimed by his family that, by just 10, he'd mastered keyboards, drums and guitar – mostly self-taught without lessons.

In a 1978 interview with the Minneapolis *Star Tribune* newspaper, Prince said: "I had one piano lesson and two guitar lessons as a kid. I was a poor student, because when a teacher would be trying to teach me how to play junky stuff, I would start playing my own songs. I'd usually get ridiculed, but I ended up doing my own thing. I can't read music. It hasn't gotten in the way yet." And it never did.

Prince fans are fond of saying he "could play 27 different instruments" (as per the credits on his self-played solo début), but that depends if you judge, say, piano and synth as different. Without doubt, Prince was a prodigy. His first school-age band, Grand Central, saw him switch between piano and guitar with songs influenced by staples of his musical life: Sly And The Family Stone; James Brown; Earth, Wind & Fire; Miles Davis; George Clinton and Parliament/Funkadelic; Carlos Santana; Fleetwood Mac; Jimi Hendrix and even Todd Rundgren. As Prince told label VP Lenny Waronker on signing for Warner Bros: "Don't make me black". He said: "My idols are all over the place".

Early producer David Z was staggered at Prince's ability. "He did all the instruments. He had a little cassette machine into which he'd hummed each part. The horn part, the guitar part – he had it all separated. It was really evolved. He was 16, 17 years old."

More guitar sessions with Minneapolis outfit 94 East followed, but these were really just stepping stones to a solo career. His rise – through 1978-81 albums *For You*, *Prince*, *Dirty Mind* and *Controversy* – was steady and assured. And, indeed, lyrically controversial.

Prince's provocative and sinuous funk was often too hot for mainstream radio, but by '81 he was supporting The Rolling Stones. But a musical polymath in thigh-high leather boots and codpiece sometimes proved too much for the Stones' faithful, and Prince was often booed. No matter, as '82 saw the beginning of an astonishing run of mainstream form...

Revolution and evolution

The albums *1999*, *Purple Rain*, *Parade*, *Around The World In A Day* and *Sign O' The Times* made Prince a superstar. He formed a band, The Revolution, to tour *1999* and beyond, though for recording he remained largely a lone visionary. Outside of vocals, guitarist Dez Dickerson was the only Revolution member on *1999*, other than Prince himself (notably, the guitar solo on *Little Red Corvette*).

Dickerson later recalled, "For Prince, the ultimate act of respect is for him to give you space to do what you do. I was fortunate enough to gain and keep his respect – as a result, he gave me space to do my thing. The

Prince playing a Tele during the *Dirty Mind* tour in 1981

fact that he gave me so much latitude to play in our shows speaks to the genuine respect he gave me as a guitar player. He willingly gave me room, especially when it came to soloing, to be who I was – not a clone of him, but to bring my own musical voice to the party. Those in the press often referred to me as 'Prince's metal guitarist', but, in reality, Prince always thought of us as a rock band – he wanted me to shred."

Although his music was based in part on the multi-genre scope of Sly And The Family Stone, Prince went way further. The hits flew, with a unique approach to recording. *When Doves Cry* was a home solo recording, and was released with its bassline erased. Many of his entourage were brave enough to question his wisdom, though Prince responded simply to his engineer: "Nobody else would have the balls to do this. You just wait... they'll be freaking."

Kiss started life as an acoustic 12-bar, but Prince couldn't happily complete it. He gave the song to fellow Minnesotan funkateers Mazarati, who reworked it as minimalistic electro-funk, before Prince changed his tune and took the song back. He kept Mazarati's backing vocals, added taut funk guitar à la James Brown's Jimmy Nolen and *Kiss* was another number one.

All these albums differ. *Around The World...* is softly psychedelic, *Parade* is mostly clipped funk, *Purple Rain* – the biggest of all – is the rockiest. "There's every emotion, from the ballad to the rocker," reckoned Jon Bon Jovi. "All the influences were evident, from Hendrix to Chic." And *Sign O' The Times*, mostly another solo work, was epic. *The Village Voice*'s renowned critic/essayist Robert Christgau opined it "established Prince as the greatest rock 'n' roll musician of the era – as singer-guitarist-hooksmith-beatmaster, he has no peer."

> Prince was creating at a staggering rate. By the time one album was out, he'd completed the next

Prince was creating at a simply staggering rate. By the time one album had been released, he'd often completed his next. Mostly on his own. He told *Rolling Stone* in 1985: "The reason I don't use musicians a lot of the time had to do with the hours that I worked. I swear to God, it's not out of boldness when I say this, but there's not a person around who can stay awake as long as I can. Music is what keeps me awake."

2 much 2 release?

Musicians often talk about waiting for inspiration to strike. For Prince, it was seemingly the opposite: the well of ideas was ever-overflowing. The *Graffiti Bridge* album (1990) was made up mostly of songs he couldn't fit on previous releases: *Diamonds And Pearls* ('91) and the ☥ ('92) album incorporated rap and hip-hop. The released-then-pulled *Black Album* ('94, but recorded in '87) was hard funk that parodied hip-hop... Too many songs? Warner Bros certainly thought so and tried to rein in the artist. Prince, meanwhile, went into open dispute with Warner, demanding control of his master recordings and releases. The title of his 18th album, the under-achieving *Chaos And Disorder*, seemed an appropriate summary of where his ideas were at.

But for all the stylistic switches and bombardment of songs, Prince simply wanted freedom to do what he liked. Art for art's sake. And he was both iconoclast and traditionalist.

He once noted: "I realise I'm part of a musical history and I revere the legacy of my predecessors... I don't care what the media says. I know how I am and what really counts. I just want it more to be like the old days, you know: it's about the book, not the quote."

He later added: "When was the last time you were scared by anyone? In the 70s, there was scary stuff then... accountants and lawyers stepped in while producers were in the studio, they started looking for things they thought would work, so dozens of rock bands come out every week and you can't even name them..."

Of his own unfathomable ability, Prince occasionally seemed unaware that most musicians simply couldn't do what he could. "I don't think people learn technique anymore," he complained. "There are no great jazz-fusion bands. I grew up seeing Weather Report, and I don't see anything remotely >

PRINCE'S GUITARS

Just as weird and wonderful as their owner...

Just as Prince didn't make ordinary music, he didn't play ordinary guitars. With talk of his Paisley Park complex becoming a museum of Princedom, maybe one day all of these guitars will come together...

HS Anderson/Hohner Mad Cats

A T-type, made originally by a Japanese factory called Moridaira – its high-quality copies were re-badged for Western companies. In the USA, this maple-bodied Tele copy was originally known as a HS Anderson Mad Cat. The centre stripe is walnut and the binding imitation mahogany. Instead of a typical Tele bridge, Prince's main Mad Cat had a bridge similar to that found on a hardtail Strat. Surrounding the bridge was an oval of plastic that matched the pickguard. Prince changed the pickups to Kinman Broadcasters, altering this bridge pup surround.

Hohner eventually made replicas – The Prinz and TE Prinz (with a different headstock, after a legal threat from Fender), but its the earlier HS Anderson models that are most coveted. Prince bought his original Mad Cat in the 70s, drawn to it because he already had a tortoiseshell strap.

Cloud guitars

Custom builds by David Husain of the Knut Koupee music store in Minneapolis. The first was all-white with a maple body and neck, and debuted in the *Purple Rain* movie (the album was mainly his Mad Cat). It has a 24.75-inch scale, 22 frets and a 12-inch radius, plus two EMGs – an active EMG 81 'bucker at the bridge and an EMG SA single coil at the neck. The gold-plated hardware is by Schaller.

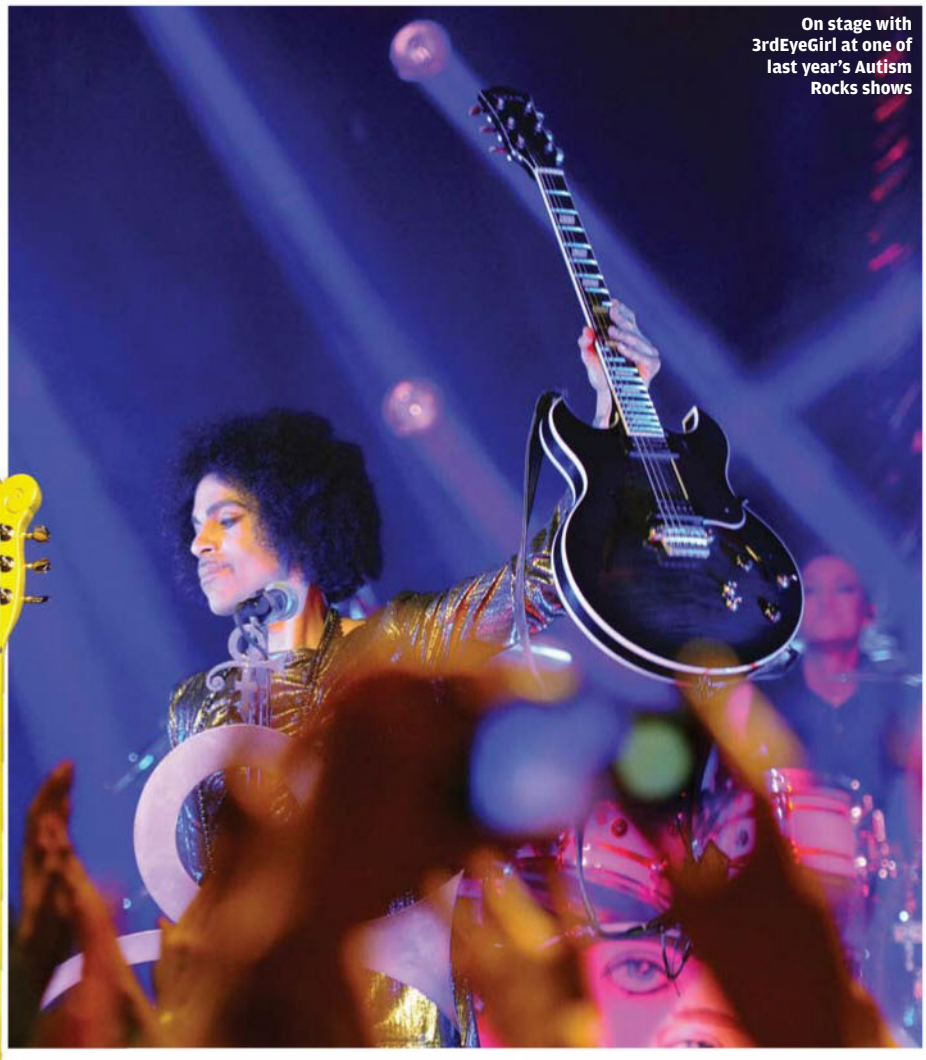
Later variations included a black Cloud (with maple 'board) and blue (Blue Angel), yellow and peach versions – he nicknamed his favourite four North, South, East and West. Prince's yellow Cloud ('89) is on show at the Smithsonian National Museum Of American History. Schecter was commissioned to build, for a time, copies (with Duncan Designed pickups and Grover machineheads, no brass nut) available only via Prince's website. Any Clouds in Hard Rock Cafés are authorised builds by Prince's techs, but not necessarily played by him.

Symbol guitars

These were custom-built by German luthier Jerry Auerswald, with antique maple neck-through-body construction, originally in gold with a 24.75-inch scale, 24 medium jumbo frets and EMGs. Auerswald custom-built the bridge and installed Schaller M6 machineheads with custom-made buttons. There are black, white, yellow, gold and purple finishes (black and white built by Prince's techs).

The Model C

A unique Auerswald design, with stabiliser 'sustain bow' running from the body to the headstock, plus behind-the-bridge tuners and an EMG humbucker. In 3rdEyeGirl, Prince played Vox HDC-77s and, on his last live guitar shows, a GUS guitar (in purple/gold) by UK luthier Simon Farmer. For studio work, he also called upon a Gibson Les Paul Jr covered with fake fur, a Lake Placid Blue Strat, dark blue Tele with flower finish, and a George Benson-autographed Ibanez archtop.



On stage with 3rdEyeGirl at one of last year's Autism Rocks shows

like that now. There's nothing to copy from, because you can't go and see a band like Weather Report. Al Di Meola, the guitar player, he'd just stand in the centre of the stage, soloing, until everyone gives him a standing ovation. Those were the memories that I grew up with and that made me want to play." And, similarly: "There's no good funk happening these days. I'm still waiting for George Clinton to do something."

Sly Stone's fabled bassist Larry Graham became a collaborator and friend; he was seen as a pivotal influence on Prince becoming a Jehovah's Witness. But the respect was mutual. Of the early days when they played together, Graham noted: "When we got up there and jammed together, it was like we'd been playing together forever." Of his own bass skills, Prince told *Bass Player* magazine: "Larry Graham is my teacher. Just put Larry Graham in your notebook."

> His soloing was bursting with a limitless freedom that's rarely bottled

The music kept flowing, albeit at diminishing commercial returns. Not that this was a driver of Prince's music. Sheryl Crow, a collaborator on one of Prince's last truly huge albums, *Rave Un2 The Joy Fantastic* in 1999, told *Billboard* that: "I've heard him play piano like Chick Corea or Herbie Hancock, move over to bass and play like Larry Graham, and then play guitar like Jimi Hendrix or Buddy Guy."

But rather than any pastiche, Prince always sounded like himself. His command of the guitar, for example, was staggering: his soloing was not only technically dazzling, but bursting with a limitless freedom that's rarely bottled. His funk rhythm skills were impeccable, with a pure, glassy tone. It's typical that the artists he worked with were as diverse as blues slide guitar queen Bonnie Raitt, jazz legend Miles Davis and Rita Ora.

The final releases in his lifetime? Simultaneous albums in 2014: *Art Official Age* (solo R&B) and *Plectrumelectrum* (70s throwback guitar rock/funk) as part of the band 3rdEyeGirl, plus 2015's *HitnRun*

(varied tracks recorded over a long period). "People call me a workaholic," Prince once admitted, "but I've always considered that a compliment. John Coltrane played the saxophone 12 hours a day. That's not a maniac; that's a dedicated musician whose spirit drives his body to work so hard. I think it's something to aspire to. People say that I take myself too seriously. I consider that a compliment, too."

What's in the vault?

With 39 studio albums released, there's plenty of Prince out there. Yet some close to him believe there are at least 25 more "completed" albums in the Paisley Park vault. "It's an actual bank vault, with a thick door," explains Prince's former sound engineer, Susan Rogers.

There'll inevitably be much discussion about what to issue among interested parties: Prince left no will. What shouldn't happen is any postmortem tinkering. Of melding his work with deceased artists – of which, of course, he is now one – he told *Guitar World:* "That's the most demonic thing imaginable. Everything is as it is, and it should be. If I was meant to jam with Duke Ellington, we would have lived in the same age. That whole virtual reality thing... it really is demonic. And I am not a demon. Also, what they did with that Beatles song [*Anthology 1*'s *Free As A Bird*], manipulating John Lennon's voice to have him singing from across the grave... that'll never happen to me. To prevent that kind of thing from happening is another reason why I want artistic control."

So what will we eventually hear without 'manipulation'? Prince once said he definitely wanted to release the "indescribable" funk/jazz album he made in the late-80s/early-90s with Miles Davis, "long improvisations that I will release at some point." There's *The Undertaker*, a '94 live-in-the studio album of hard-rock guitar jams as a three-piece, featuring a cover of The Stones' *Honky Tonk Women*. Warner Bros originally blocked its release. Lenny Kravitz has collaborative Paisley Park recordings, but hasn't divulged the number of tracks. Prince completed at least three tracks with Bonnie Raitt, and extensive guitar/bass-led jams with Larry Graham. There's a '98 album, *Beautiful Strange*, reportedly 'finished', then shelved for the new songs of *Rave Un2 The Joy Fantastic*. There's a 2000 album, *High*, that he even made videos for... then shelved. And that's before any outtakes/alt versions.

"I have everything on tape," Prince proclaimed in the 2000s, "including all the informal jams. I record everything I do, just like Jimi Hendrix did. And eventually a lot of it will be released."

Ultimately, Prince – for all his apparent faults – was all about the music. And there's still a whole lot more to come...

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10 TOP TIPS
John Myung

Dream Theater have perfected a progressive brand of virtuosic metal, selling more than 12 million albums. The band's bassist shares his wisdom...

Interview **Gareth Morgan**

1 Warm up

"Warming up is something all musicians should do and it's something that's related directly to maintaining the physicality of playing the bass. It's really important to warm up so as to avoid suffering the negative side-effects of over-playing, such as tendonitis. When you start to practise, just try to play slow for a while – at least 20 minutes to an hour. Whatever it is that you're doing, play slow and build from there. We tend to forget sometimes that playing an instrument is a physical activity and there are muscles involved that you shouldn't simply shock into action. I think with any athlete, and there's a definite athletic correlation to playing, it's best to always warm up. Do your best to play slowly and carefully before you actually go for it. It's only when you rush that you wind up hurting yourself. My warm-up is often just playing a simple pattern and moving it up in half steps to the very top of the neck, then working my way back down. If you can't think of something cool to play, just work on a scale. That's cool enough!"

2 Use the fretboard of your bass as a visual aid

"The fretboard is very logical in a visual sense and a real helpful part of the bass that you can use in terms of your study of the instrument. Things take on this very visual shape on your fretboard, it's really helpful. If you're learning a scale and you don't really know what it's supposed to sound like, you only know that you're actually playing it correctly if you learn the organisation of the notes on your fretboard. You get to the point where you can actually just look at it and see its inherent patterns and shapes – the shapes of the scales, if you like. Studying these shapes means you can reduce them to building blocks and then navigate through a physical memory, which enables you to see how they all travel and link together on the fretboard. Plus you're hearing harmony (keys and chords) develop as well while you're doing that. That's just like an extension of doing basic school-work type studying."

3 Maintain your practising discipline

"If you could always, every day, put aside three hours to do something related to your instrument, you'd definitely feel the benefits in your playing. It could be learning a piece of

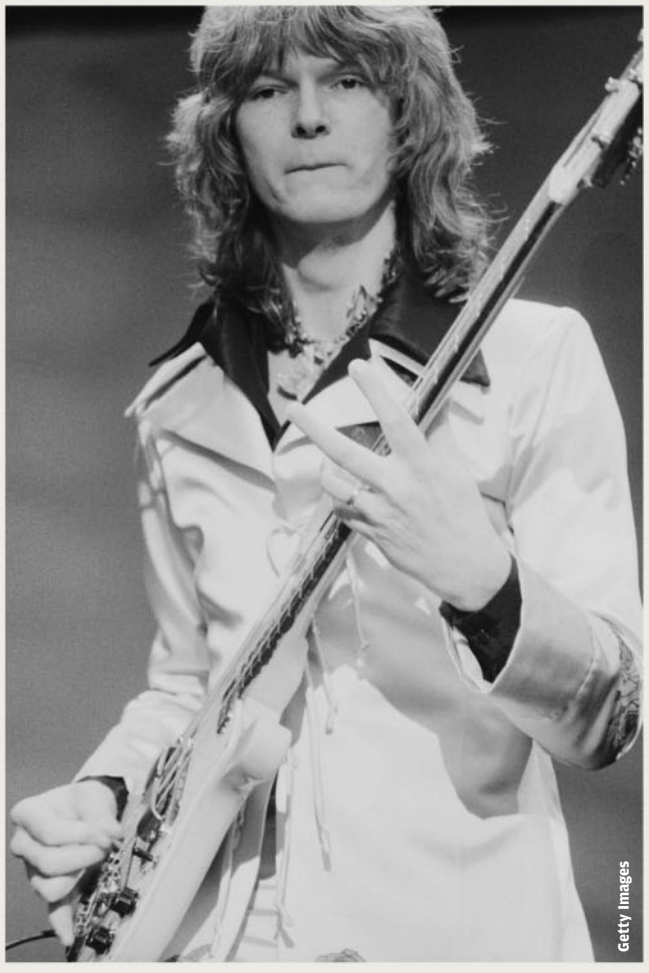
music or a song, studying a scale or another approach, or reading another person's perspective... but just always leaving that three-hour block of time every day would be really beneficial. That's almost a full day of practising out of a week by just dedicating three hours a day. The discipline of reserving that allocation of time alone develops your musical intelligence to a point where you'll naturally know what it is you should be doing in a practising sense based on the results you're getting. You'll know over a period of time whether something is working or if it's not. The allocation of time discipline is a vitally important element because it's all part of maintaining a balance between your music and the rest of your life."

4 Be motivated and determined... and get your practising done early in the day

"You need a lot of determination – that's a really important part. You've got to be determined to keep to that block of time that you're trying to achieve, and you've also got to be determined when things aren't going as well as you think they should be. From my perspective, it's very challenging, especially when things get really busy. The best way, I find, to try to tackle it is early in the day, so by early afternoon I can say "I'm done". If life takes over, you've already achieved your practising goal, and that's the most important thing. And then from there it's just a matter of being creative with what you're learning and building upon that. One of the cool things about an instrument is that learning to play is something you do over a lifetime. It's not something that's stagnant, there's always something evolving and there's always a sense of challenge. Figuring out ways to motivate yourself to learn essential elements is the real big issue when you play an instrument, because ultimately it's just desire to play that really pushes you. Sometimes it's not there, and that's when discipline kicks in."

5 Find role models and heroes to aspire to

"It's essential to help you grow and develop, especially when you've only just started to play bass. I really loved Geddy Lee of Rush, Chris Squire of Yes and Steve Harris from Iron Maiden. I really identified with the music from those bands, and I tried to combine the harmony and adventurousness of the arrangements of Yes with the metal-esque edge from Iron Maiden. Then add to this Rush's indefinable chemistry and ability to write tracks that are just really interesting to listen to. Those three bands really got me motivated to start playing. It was very much playing along to their records that made me want to be part of a band. But I also studied classical and jazz musicians – and their discipline, sense of organisation and how they play was a whole other great resource of information to draw from. My job is to be aware of all these great resources that are there and try to draw from them and organise how that works in my playing the best that I can. That's what you have to do to evolve."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6 It's not just about scales: learn songs and jam them

"Learning other people's stuff, other bass players' grooves, is a legitimate way of advancing your ability on the instrument. The music you love and listen to is like a real-time library that's all around you all of the time. When I first started playing, I was very much into learning by playing along to records and then, with the guys I was playing with, we would jam on the songs we learnt. Me and [Dream Theater guitarist] John Petrucci were playing covers, working on songs and jamming, not realising that we were also searching for our own identity and sound. That stuff was developing outside of our control. And this eventually led to us forming a serious band and then embarking on this big life adventure that's occupied the majority of my musical career. That's one really unique situation that has been a very big part of my life, and it all sprang from learning to play the music that I loved and sharing it with other like-minded musicians and friends."

> "It all sprang from learning to play the music I loved and sharing it with other musicians"

7 Learn how to be a team player

"When you're playing in a group, whether it's your first, second or 25th, you are immersing yourself with individuals – and the goal is to create meaningful music. The important thing to realise is that meaningful music comes with everyone's respect for one another and everyone doing >

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their part to make it the best it could possibly be. So it's very much about learning how to be a team player. One of the standard problems or issues in any situation is that there'll be songs you really love and songs that you don't love as much. With the latter, the solution is very much about figuring out a way of getting to that point where you play just as well, just as passionately on your least favourite songs. And when you're looking for the source of the problem, start with yourself. Maybe you're playing it the wrong way or with the wrong approach. So maybe just changing your approach could lead you to the place where you're playing the song better and appreciating it more."

8 Your first serious bass should be both comfortable to play and versatile

"You need to look to play an instrument that is comfortable under your hand. And it'd also be cool to gravitate towards something that is useful in a professional sense. In other words, versatile. If you have to do studio work, it needs to be capable of keeping everyone happy – the engineer, the band – and be easy to get a cool, quality sound from that's good to work with. I tend to gravitate more towards basses that are proven – I've played so many different ones, and at times I've felt that, rather than try to re-invent the wheel, it's already been invented! Just pick out something that works really well for you. I tend to have an appreciation for classic instruments, basses with a proven track record and a history of doing the groove job in a wide variety of situations. But, specifically, find a bass that really fits your playing style – one that agrees with your hands and how it rests up against your body, and things like that."

9 If it all gets too much, tomorrow is another day

"If you're ever feeling particularly down about your playing or having a bad day at the practising office, don't just keep smashing your head against a brick wall. This is never gonna achieve the practising goals you've been carefully setting yourself, you'll just wind up getting frustrated. Everybody has bad days, and it's important to recognise when you're having one with your bass. I would get out and go for a walk, just clear your head and get back to it the next day. It's not about that day, it's about being able to get up the next day and pick up the bass again. It's not about frustrating yourself to the point of feeling down about playing your bass and making music. It's not about getting to a certain space where you say to yourself 'well, I don't wanna do this anymore', it's more like 'well, get away from it for a while'. Change the scenery, break things up and then come back to it with a fresh perspective. Some days will be better than others."

LISTEN UP

DREAM THEATER
The Astonishing (2016)
The band's 13th studio album lives up to its name – it's a two-hour concept album, spanning 34 tracks and some huge guitar and bass sounds.

DREAM THEATER
A Change Of Seasons (1995)
An unusual mix and the first album to feature Derek Sherinian on keyboards, it opens with the epic 23-minute title track and features a series of excellent live cover versions.

DREAM THEATER
Images And Words (1986)
James LaBrie's first album with the band is one of their best. John Petrucci's playing is phenomenal and the songwriting on tracks such as *Metropolis Pt. 1* and *Pull Me Under* is from the top drawer.

10 Foster good relations with your band-mates

"Getting on well with the other people in the band can be easily overlooked. If you have a group of individuals and they're all incredible, but they're not willing to work on a really serious level, I don't think you're gonna last very long and you could miss out on something special. There'll be tension and the longevity of the situation will be questionable. Being a musician is demanding and a lot of things you need to know are not talked about or taught. Learning how to work in a group setting and listen to opinions of the people you're trying to be creative with is vitally important. That's where who you are as a person becomes an important resource. You draw from everything you know and could possibly do. You beg, borrow and steal to make the situation as good as it could be."

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Lonnie Mack

1941 - 2016

The guitar world lost one of its great pioneers when Lonnie Mack died in April. *G&B* salutes a peerless lead player who influenced Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck, Stevie Ray Vaughan and countless others

G&B was saddened by the news that US country, blues and rock guitarist and vocalist Lonnie Mack died from natural causes in Tennessee this April, aged 74. Rising to prominence in the late 1950s with a distinctive style that both fitted into and extended the possibilities of rock 'n' roll's musical landscape, Mack's 'blue-eyed soul' vocals and fleet-fingered, rhythmic lead-guitar phrasing made him a significant influence on generations of guitarists, among them Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck, Duane Allman, Bootsy Collins and Stevie Ray Vaughan.

His aggressive, articulate lead-guitar style is based on extended bluesy pentatonic runs, soulful bends and slippery glissandos over metronomically precise rhythm motifs. It has resulted in him often being credited as a pioneer who evolved the potential of the electric guitar as a virtuoso lead instrument.

Born Lonnie McIntosh in rural Indiana, he claimed to have begun playing guitar aged four. Mack soon traded his bicycle for his very own six-string, learning music from a mum who sang and played guitar, a dad who played banjo and an uncle versed in Travis picking and Delta blues guitar styles. Playing mostly gospel and country music, he began to meld influences from R&B players such as Jimmy Reed and Ray Charles into his jazz, blues and country style. By the late 50s, he was touring Indiana, Kentucky and Ohio as a teenager, fronting his own band. A stint as a session player for Fraternity Records in the early 60s, backing the likes of James Brown, Freddie King and Hank Ballard, led to Mack recording an instrumental version of Chuck Berry's *Memphis, Tennessee*, titled *Memphis*, in 1962, which was a hit the following year and, along with follow-up single *Wham!*, launched his career when they appeared on the 1964 album *The Wham Of That Memphis Man!*.

He later signed to Elektra Records, cutting three albums between 1969 and 1971, during which time he played on a number of sessions. Most famously, he became Ray Manzarek's left-hand man, providing bass on The Doors' *Roadhouse Blues* and *Maggie M'Gill* on *Morrison Hotel*. After this, Mack all but disappeared into obscurity for a decade. He was also shot during an argument with an off-duty police officer in Cincinnati, resulting in his signature tune, *Cincinnati Jail*.

> Mack's fleet-fingered lead-guitar phrasing made him an influence on generations of guitarists

Seventh heaven

Mack became synonymous with his Gibson Flying V, a 1958 that he bought that same year from a Norwood, Ohio music shop called Hughes Music; he was attracted to its arrow-like shape because it resonated with his part-Native American ethnicity. The (now practically priceless) guitar left Gibson's Kalamazoo Factory with the serial number 007 and Mack bonded with it for the rest of his life – although he did once throw the unlucky 'Number 7' in a bin after a gig in frustration at his own playing, only to have a fan return it to him soon after. The guitar subsequently suffered a headstock replacement and a Mack-administered purple-turning-to pink paintjob, before being finished in Cherry, and had refrets, but few upgrades, during its eventful life. "It's well used," Mack told Gibson.com. "It ain't no mint-condition guitar. I've left that sucker sitting on stages all over the world."

The V had a Bigsby vibrato, mounted on a stainless-steel bracket that spanned the guitar body's 'wings'. His breakout instrumental hit, *Wham!* pricked up the ears of every guitarist who heard it, thanks to its groundbreaking use of the Bigsby (which Mack manipulated as he picked) together with the 'true vibrato' effect of his Magnatone Custom 280 amp to induce a queasy pitch-shift reminiscent of a gospel Hammond organ. That song is the reason guitarists came to call vibrato units 'whammy bars', and was the record a nine-year-old Stevie Ray Vaughan wore out on his turntable, playing along to it at half-speed. In 1993, Gibson produced 185 limited-edition Lonnie Mack Signature Flying Vs.

Stevie Ray, who counted Mack as one of his idols and friends, later helped revive Mack's career. He co-produced and played on his 1985 record, *Strike Like Lightning*, which was the beginning of a career revival for Mack – and for an idea of the (fully acknowledged) debt of gratitude SRV owed to Mack, listen to *Scuttle Buttin'* by the former after *Chicken Pickin'* by the latter... or search on YouTube for the two playing *Wham!* together live, in telepathic harmony. The pair shared a love of heavy-gauge strings, too, with Mack favouring Gibson Sonomatic 340 0.013 to 0.056-gauge, and he often employed a capo to play in the open position, a trick adopted by Stevie's brother, Jimmie.

Mack released 13 albums, culminating in 1990's *Lonnie Mack Live – Attack Of The Killer V*, and toured into the 2000s, until diabetes and poor health intervened. Inducted into the Rockabilly Hall Of Fame and the International Guitar Hall Of Fame, he relocated to a farm near Nashville until the end of his life.

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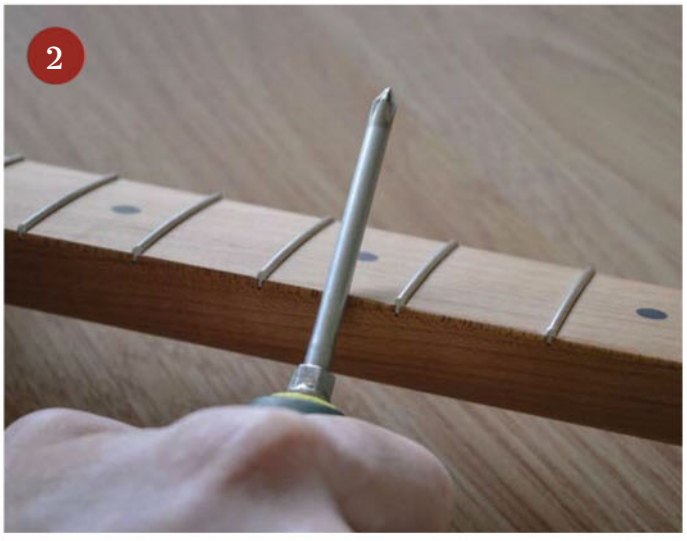
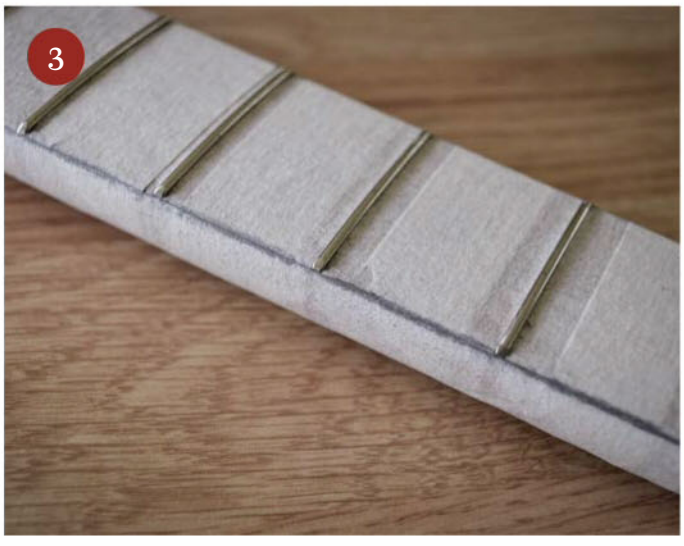
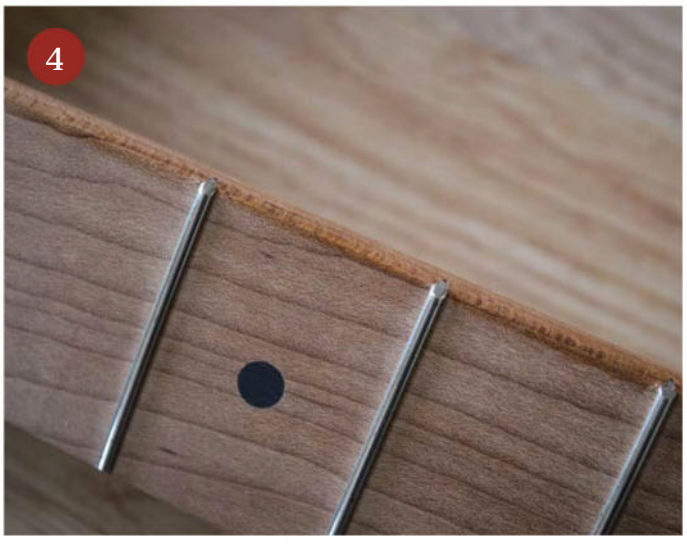
DIY WORKSHOP

NECK PROJECT

Fitting a new Telecaster neck isn't simply a matter of bolting on and rocking out. **Huw Price** goes to work on a lovely roasted maple example...







1 The neck left the factory with sharp fingerboard edges and fret ends

2 A smooth screwdriver shaft was used to roll the fingerboard edges. No wood is removed during this process. Instead, the wood fibres are compressed. You can use the same technique on the headstock edges prior to spraying

3 Sanding the fret ends creates a fine grey dust. Masking off the neck prevents this dust from working its way into the wood

4 The end result is a comfy 'played in' feel with soft edges and smooth frets

How good are the replacement necks you see advertised everywhere, and how much work is needed to get them playing properly? We decided to find out, so we contacted Allparts UK to get hold of a fat, Fender-licensed Tele neck. Allparts has lately introduced a line of 'roasted' maple necks, and having recently reviewed a Bourgeois acoustic with a torrefied soundboard, this certainly captured our attention.

Whether you call it torrefaction, baking or roasting, the idea is the same. The wood is carefully heat treated to cook off the oils, resins and moisture to leave it harder and more stable. The process was developed to prepare wood for years of outdoor use and it makes the timber darker and almost impervious to moisture. In recent years, Gibson has even used roasted maple as a substitute for rosewood fingerboards.

The heat treatment changes the look of the wood because the sugars in the maple caramelise to darken the colour and accentuate grain patterns. The unfinished Allparts neck arrived with a gorgeous colour that more closely resembled Victorian pitch pine or cedar than regular maple. It smelled different too, with a mustiness that reminded me of sticking my nose in various vintage acoustics.

Most exciting of all, roasting accelerates what is a natural aging process in cut timber. Inevitably, claims are being made that heat-treated tonewood has a more 'vintage' tone from the get-go, with some people claiming that baked maple is closer in tone to ebony.

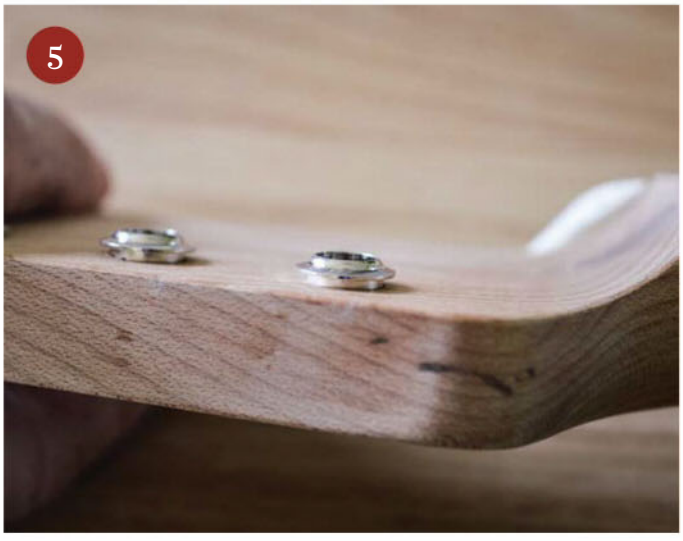
Suspending the neck loosely from my fingers at the headstock and tapping it produced a clear note ($B_\flat$, as it happens) that sustained for at least two seconds. Despite its formidable 50s profile, the neck also felt lighter than usual. The plan was to match it with a lightweight swamp ash body and fit a set of white button Kluson-style tuners. I wanted to get the neck prepared and tested before I started spraying.

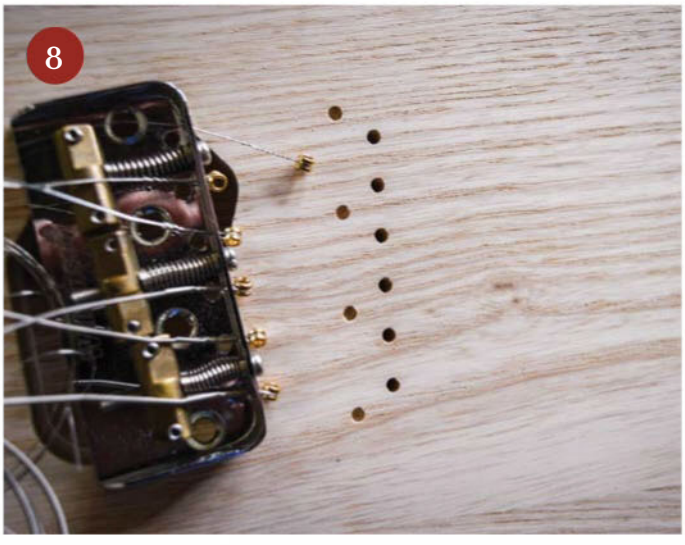
Rolling the edges

Everybody loves the comfortable feel of a well-played neck. If you've been lucky enough to play a vintage Fender maple neck, you may have noticed the edges of the fingerboard are slightly rounded and you can barely feel the ends of the frets.

This 'softening' or 'breaking in' is the effect of wood having been worn away through playing. There's also a strong possibility that one or two re-frets will have been carried out, and whenever fret ends are beveled some wood is lost.

The Allparts neck arrived with the frets properly seated and very neatly beveled, but the fingerboard edges were sharp, so I decided to





roll them over 1. Addressing the board issue is quick and easy; take a screwdriver with a smooth round shaft, place it at 45 degrees to the square edge, press it onto the edge of the board and move back and forth between the frets. The idea is to compress the wood fibres between frets rather than remove wood, and after two or three passes at various angles you'll see and feel the difference 2.

As you move to the higher frets, you may need to change to a screwdriver with a narrower diameter shaft. The smaller screwdriver may be useful for getting the rollover all the way up to the frets too. This process doesn't take long and even a subtle softening of the edges makes a big improvement to playing comfort.

Fret ends

The softened fingerboard throws the fret ends into sharp relief, so it's time to sort them out. At this stage, I was concerned only with the fret ends, so I used a small flat file to round over the edges.

It's important to use a file with one of the narrow sides smooth. The smooth edge should always be the side closest to the wood, and you must try to avoid gouging or scratching the wood. Very little effort is required to round fret ends. Try to use a rolling motion, starting from the board side and working around the ends. Only file on the push stroke and use little more pressure than the weight of the file itself. You will see scratch marks, but do not attempt to file them out.

Once all the fret ends had been rounded, I taped over the fingerboard and ran tape along both sides of the neck. Only the frets were left exposed, and I worked my way along the fret ends with 1,500 and 2,000 grit abrasive paper. The masking tape protects the wood from the abrasive and the grey dust produced by the sanding 3 & 4.

Fitting the tuners

A set of Kluson lookalike tuners with white buttons were sourced from Allparts UK. There's no brand on the back case, but they're stamped 'Japan' on the underside and they're made by Gotoh. If you're not hung up about having the word 'Kluson' on the back, I have found Gotohs to be the best of all vintage-style tuners; they're extremely smooth and accurate and never feel slack.

The bushings will press into the headstock, but only just. I used a large reamer to widen the diameter of all the holes, and only one turn was needed before I could press them in with my fingers. I left them slightly proud of the surface so they could be removed easily 5.

The neck was flipped over and the tuners positioned. A steel >

5 At this stage, don't press the bushings all the way in. Leaving them slightly proud makes it easy to prise them up using a couple of teaspoons. Make sure you place some padding under the spoons or you'll dent the surface of the headstock

6 A metal ruler provides a straight edge for marking the position of the tuner screw holes

7 Pilot holes drilled for the tuner screws. Note how the wood is the same colour inside and out

8 These 'blind' holes mark the position of the bridge screws. We drilled them out to test-fit the neck and bridge

9 A large G clamp is required to hold the neck in place. Make sure you protect the frets and the body when you clamp up

10 Both the E strings line up perfectly, so with the neck still clamped pilot holes for the neck screws can be drilled

11 The guitar is strung up to assess whether fret levelling is necessary

ruler was used to line them all up and the positions of the screw holes were marked with a pencil **6**. When drilling the pilot holes, mark the length of the screws onto your drill bit using masking tape. In fact, make it slightly shorter and drill up to the mark. That way, you'll avoid drilling through the headstock **7**.

Test fitting

The Allparts neck will be paired up with a three-piece swamp ash Guitar Build body weighing in at just under 1.8kg. With the vintage-correct Guitar Build bodies I've encountered in the past, I've had to widen the neck pocket before an Allparts neck will fit. Luckily, the neck pocket on this eBay find happens to be the perfect size for the Allparts neck, but it was still prudent to check that everything lined up. Shallow holes for the four bridge screws were pre-drilled in the body, so I drilled pilot holes for the screws and attached a top-loader Wilkinson Cutaway bridge **8**. Using a G clamp to hold the neck in the neck pocket, I placed a pre-slotted nut into the nut slot and wrapped the the two E strings around the tuning posts to bring them up to low tension **9**.

I wanted to establish that both E strings were equidistant from the fingerboard edges to verify that the neck and body were square and no neck pocket adjustments would be necessary to line everything up **10**.

Fitting the neck

Without removing the clamp or strings, it was time to drill pilot holes for the neck screws. Neck screws were pre-drilled into the body, which made things easier. Take care to mark the exact length of the screws onto the drill bit using masking tape before drilling. If you drill through the fingerboard, you'll need a replacement for your replacement neck! It's also important to drill the pilot holes deep enough. If they're too shallow, the screws will force their way into the wood and cracks may appear in the fingerboard. I learned the hard way. Drilling the holes reveals that the darkened colour isn't only on the surface – the roasting process works throughout the timber.

Before attaching the neck, remove the clamp and widen the pre-drilled screw holes in the body. The neck screws should be able to pass through the body quite easily and only need to 'bite' into the neck wood for a solid fixing.

At last it was time for the exciting bit. I removed the masking tape, screwed the neck and body together, and strung the guitar. After some minor saddle-height adjustments, I had a playable instrument **11**.

Levelling the frets

The main purpose behind all this work was to test whether the frets would need levelling. If it proved necessary, it would be preferable to get the job done prior to applying the finish. It was actually a close call because the guitar played pretty well from the start. I could get it playing cleanly with a bit of neck relief and a medium action, but the G string sounded a bit plinky between the 7th and 12th frets and the low E buzzed slightly when I reduced the relief to a level I consider optimal and lowered the action.

The neck was removed from the guitar and the tuners from the neck. I adjusted the truss rod to ensure everything was as straight as possible, which in this case meant fully slackened-off. Once again, I taped up the neck and drew a black line across the top of each fret with a permanent marker pen 12.

Since this neck has a 9.5-inch radius, I took a 9.5-inch radius sanding block and stuck 1,500 grit paper to the block with double-sided tape. Very few passes were required to level the frets. You can tell when you're done because there will be an unbroken shiny silver line across the top of every fret where the abrasive has removed the black marker. Any low spots will remain black, which means more passes are required 13.

When you're doing this, avoid pressing on the neck or you may bend it. The weight of the block should be sufficient. With the frets level, I crowned them with a needle file and smoothed them with 1,000 and 1,500 grit abrasive paper.

With the masking tape removed, the neck was refitted to the body, along with the tuners, and the guitar was strung up again. The improvement was dramatic; every note rang clean and true with very little neck relief and a low action. At last, it was time to start spraying.

Spraying

Allparts necks usually turn up requiring relatively little preparation before spraying, but this one felt even smoother than usual. The surface felt a bit harder and sanding with 320 grit paper produced a fine dust with no raised wood fibres. The bare wood felt so good, I decided to leave the back of the neck unfinished. Clear gloss nitrocellulose would be applied only to the headstock, fingerboard and the end of the neck.

Once any remaining dust had been removed by brushing and wiping with white spirit, a screw was put into one of the tuner screw holes and a riser placed under the heel. With the neck lifted off the surface, the front and sides were >

12 With masking tape protecting the neck once again, a black marker pen was run along the top of every fret

13 A few passes with a radius block and 1,000 grit paper were all that was needed to level the frets. Work until you see an unbroken line of shiny metal along the top of every fret, then you're done

14 As usual, we went with clear gloss nitrocellulose lacquer from Manchester Guitar Tech. No tint was required to bring out this beautiful cherry colour. The first coats were all sprayed from the front to keep the lacquer away from the back of the neck because we wanted the bare-wood feel

15 To spray the rear of the headstock, newspaper was used to mask the back of the neck. The masking tape is raised up to avoid creating a sharp lacquer line. Ensure you spray from behind the raised tape to prevent the lacquer pooling under the tape

16 The headstock was polished to a high gloss, but we decided to leave the fingerboard with a satin look

17 The transition from lacquer to bare wood was seamless. It will probably become more noticeable as the neck darkens with use

18 Removing the lacquer from the frets is fairly easy because lacquer doesn't adhere particularly well to metal. Wire wool works best, followed by chrome polish. The shiny area in this photo shows where the lacquer has come off. The lacquer looks opaque on the right-hand side, where it remains intact

spayed with the neck flat **14**. After sufficient coats had been applied, the lacquer was allowed to dry, then newspaper was wrapped around the neck for protection as the back of the headstock was sprayed **15**. The wood looked gorgeous before it was sprayed, and even better afterwards; the colour took on a deep amber orange that looks more like cherry than maple. Or perhaps one of those ancient Fender necks after decades of smoky bar room gigs.

Finishing up

The heel and headstock were rubbed back with wet and dry abrasive paper and micromesh before being polished to a high gloss with Farecla G3. I prefer G3 to T-Cut because there's no ammonia smell and the polish doesn't soften the lacquer. Swirls were removed with 3M machine polish **16** & **17**.

The fingerboard is trickier and I find ultra-fine wire wool the most effective way of flatting back the finish up to the edges of the frets. Press lightly and let the wire wool do the work. I followed up with 1,500 grit paper and micromesh. I decided I preferred the satin feel and look of the unpolished lacquer because it blended better with the un-lacquered back of the neck. So rather than use polishing compounds, I buffed it with my palm and fingers. This generates some heat and brings up a satin sheen that I really like.

Once again, low-tack masking tape was used to protect the fingerboard, and I set about removing the lacquer from the top of the frets **18**. Wire wool proved the most effective option and once all the lacquer had been removed, I buffed the frets with chrome polish.

Verdict

This neck would have been usable from the get-go, but with a bit of finessing it started to feel and play superbly, and this was an easy and enjoyable project, requiring little outlay and no specialist tools.

Having put the tuners back on, along with a nut, I was able to test the sound. My previous experience has been that a fat and chunky neck usually equates to a bright tone with crisp definition and plenty of sustain. Thinner necks tend to sound warmer and fuller.

With our test Tele body, this roasted neck had the smooth, mellow tone of a thinner neck, with improved sustain and definition. The guitar was more resonant, too. There seems to be something to this roasting business after all.

NEXT MONTH...

Huw returns to his Gretsch restoration project as his vintage Anniversary takes a step closer to becoming a 6120

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STONE DEAF
SD30
STONE DEAF
STONE DEAF
SD8
STONE DEAF
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Echopark Downtowner Custom Carved Top

Old-stock timbers, Custom pickups and vintage tone. **CHRIS VINNICOMBE** tries a dream machine on for size...

Back in the April 2016 issue, *G&B* had its first encounter with Gabriel Currie, the man behind Echopark Guitars and builder of instruments for such luminaries as Queens Of The Stone Age star Josh Homme and Aerosmith legend Joe Perry. As well as seeing the inside of the old-school Echopark workshop in El Monte in the San Gabriel Valley, about 18 miles east of Downtown Los Angeles, we also reviewed the Model J, Gabriel's fusion of Telecaster and Jazzmaster influences.

We'd previously heard rumours that, while his bolt-on instruments are impressive, Gabriel's set-neck guitars are utterly sensational. It was with considerable anticipation, then, that we took delivery of the very first Downtowner Custom Carved Top for review – an instrument we'd first seen and swooned over in El Monte in January. A singlecut 'burst with a few twists, the Downtowner's top is a wonderful slice of figured big leaf maple with ripples of flame and pronounced striping that give it a real individuality. Meanwhile, the herringbone purfling and 'Imperial' fingerboard inlays, with their hand-tooled, mosaic-like patterns, are almost like something from another time, as if unearthed from an Ancient Greek vault.

We caught up with Gabriel to find out what this fantastic-looking – and fantastically expensive – synthesis of old-stock timbers is all about. "The main benefit [of using old-stock timbers] is stability," says Gabriel. "That's because the dry/cure time for an air-dried big leaf maple flitch can be three to five years. Most of what I use for my tops are in the 15-30-plus year range, depending on what pile that I mill from.

"Some challenges arise in the milling, when cutting into a blank that hasn't seen a blade in 30 to 50 years after being buried in a stack of timbers for that long. Tensions release in the process of shaping a neck blank from older timbers at times, so I triple-mill all my fretboard surfaces to get them dead flat at zero action on the truss rod and let them sit for a few days prior to the gluing of the board. This ensures a neck void of tension prior to stringing."

Like the other Echoparks we've played, Gabriel's old-school methods give the Downtowner a vintage-style personality

In use

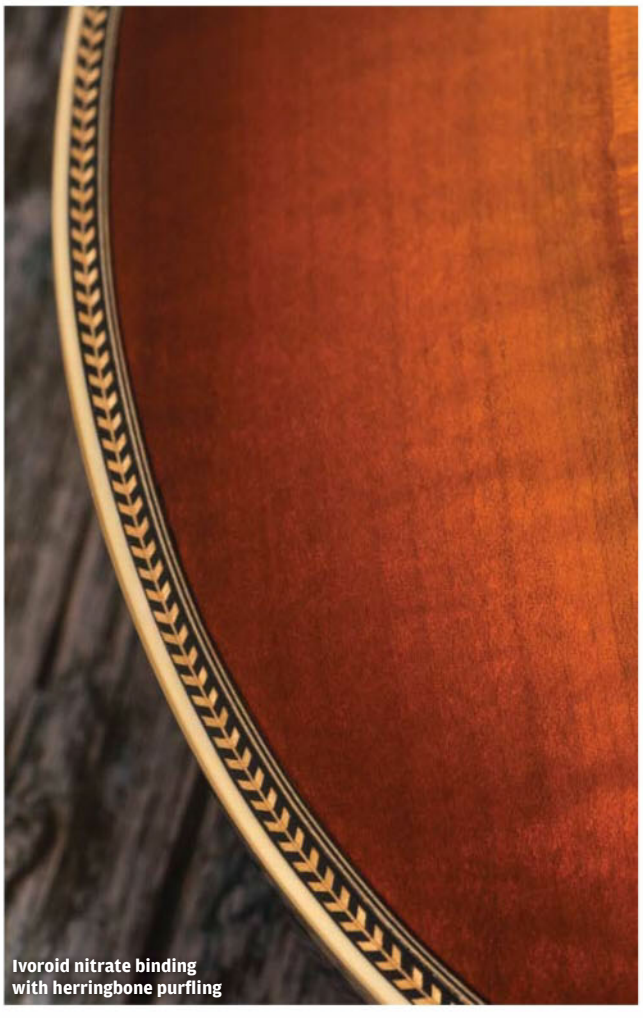
No allowances are made for the inexperienced, as there are no position markers on the bass side of the neck, but this isn't exactly an instrument for the beginner. Like the other Echoparks we've played, Gabriel's old-school methods and seasoned tonewoods seem to give the Downtowner a vintage-style personality and >

No shrinking violets here: rose-etched nickel covers feature on the Arcane pickups

KEY FEATURES

Echopark Downtowner Custom Carved Top

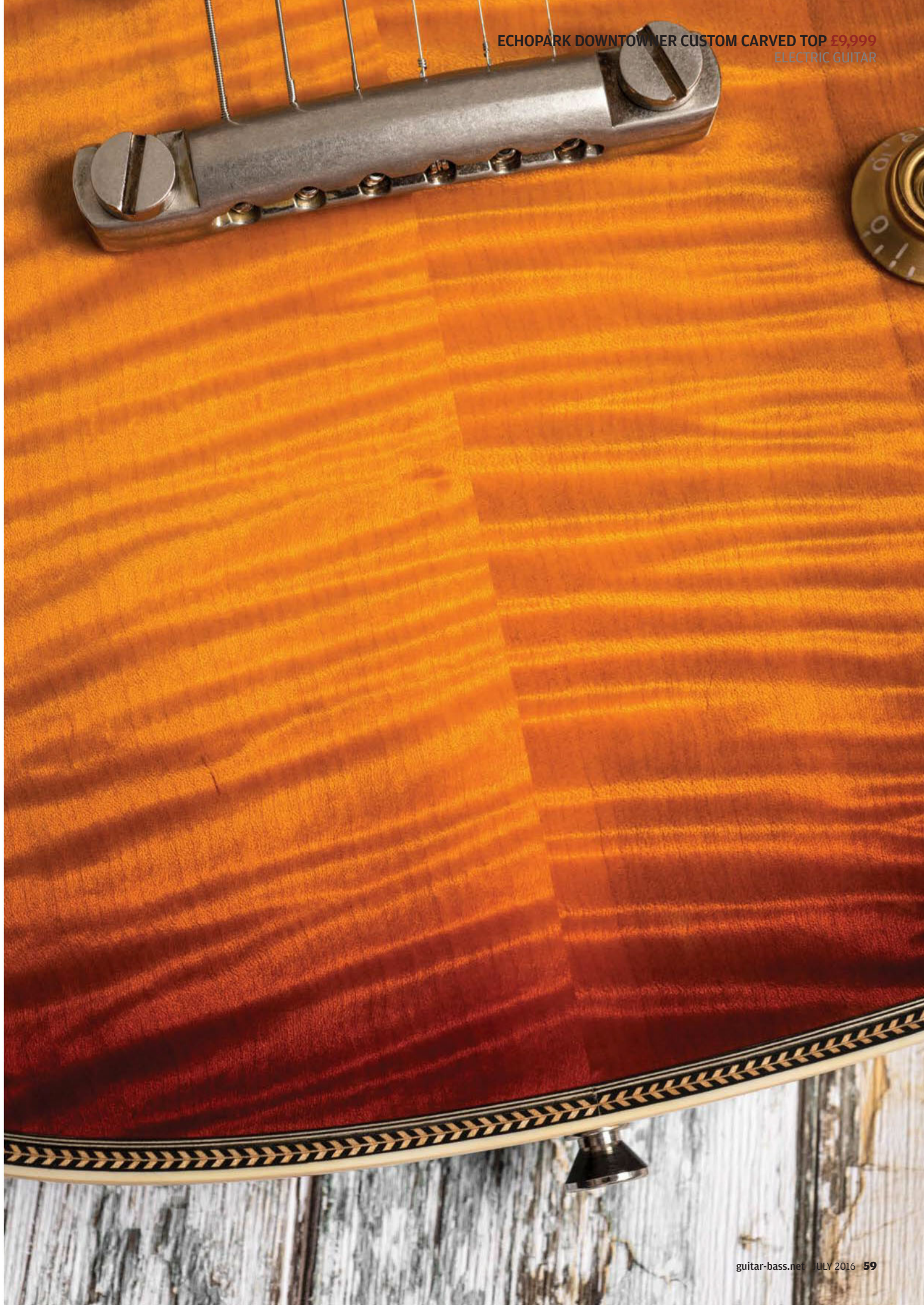
- **PRICE** £9,999
- **DESCRIPTION** Six-string electric, hand-made in the USA
- **BUILD** Old-stock AAAA big leaf flamed maple carved top with ivoroid nitrate binding and herringbone purfling, old-stock Honduran mahogany back with light lower bout chambering, old-stock quarter-sawn korina neck with 'large 59 D' profile, pepperwood headstock overlay, old-stock figured Amazon rosewood fretboard with custom 'Imperial' inlays, 22 Jescar jumbo frets, bone nut & nitrate tortoiseshell pickguard
- **HARDWARE** Vintage-style tune-o-matic bridge and stop tailpiece with steel bushings, Kluson Waffleback tuners
- **ELECTRICS** 2x Custom Arcane humbuckers, CTS 500k long-shaft pots (2x volume, 2x tone) with old-stock Asteron paper-in-oil capacitors and three-way toggle pickup selector switch
- **SCALE LENGTH** 24.75"/628.6mm
- **NECK WIDTH** 42mm at nut, 51.5mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 23mm at first fret, 25mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 35mm at nut, 51mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 8.4lbs/3.8kg
- **FINISH** 2-Tone Aged Scotch Burst nitrocellulose
- **CONTACT** Coda Music 01438 350815 **coda-music.com** **echoparkguitars.com**



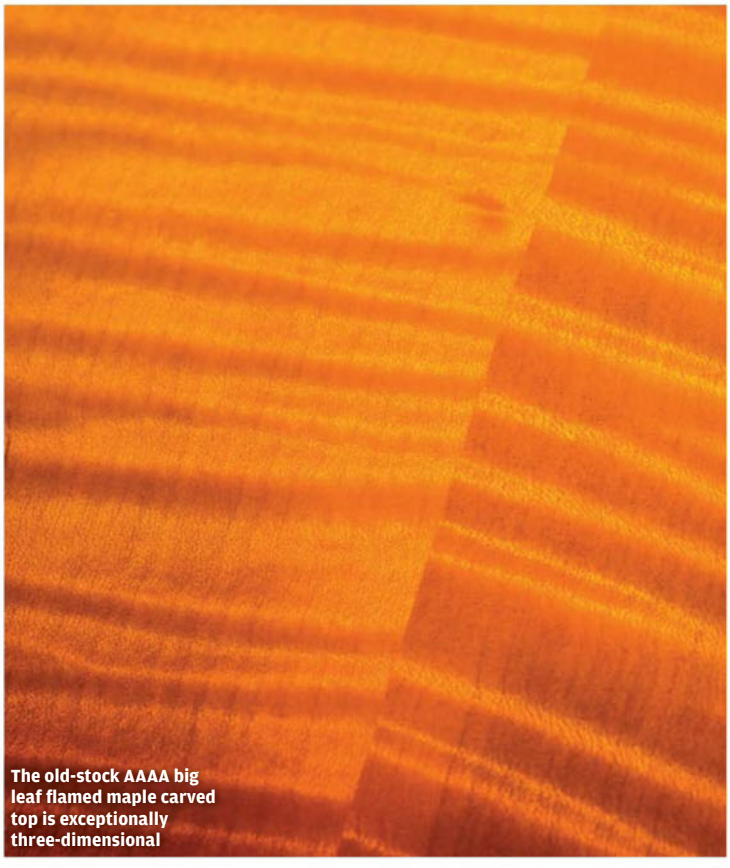
Ivoroid nitrate binding with herringbone purfling

Kluson Waffleback nickel tuners with pearloid keystone buttons

Old-stock figured Amazon rosewood fretboard with custom 'Imperial' inlays



The pepperwood headstock overlay is a nice touch


The old-stock AAAA big leaf flamed maple carved top is exceptionally three-dimensional

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...
A **Heavy Aged Gibson Custom True Historic 1959 Les Paul £8,499** will get you pretty damn close to the '59 experience without having to sell your house for the privilege. For a more affordable **Echopark** set neck model, check out the **Downtowner Deluxe £3,699**. If you can get hold of one, the **PRS Private Stock Super Eagle £10,995** has the stamp of approval from Paul Reed Smith and John Mayer.

a voice that sounds decades rather than months old, straight out of the case.

In common with the handful of PAF-equipped 1950s Les Pauls we've played, the Downtowner has an airy, slightly flute-y quality to the tonality and a phenomenal touch sensitivity, which makes it enormously expressive for lead playing, aided by fabulous playability. The neck is big, sure – bigger than many 'bursts as it fattens out to about an inch along most of its length, but upper-fret access is slightly easier than a Les Paul Standard and the action and set-up is so damn slinky that you bond instantly with this guitar – perhaps a little more than is healthy for the bank balance!

While the Arcane humbuckers here – based on a set of 1960 PAFs that Gabriel and Arcane's Rob Timmons were able to spec out – are undoubtedly special, even played acoustically the instrument retains many of the same expressive sonic characteristics that you hear in its amplified voice. We suspect that Gabriel's use of chambering is contributory to the openness of the guitar's voice.

"It's a combination of many things, and they all matter," he says. "The pickups, neck tenon, wood choices, how it's cut; then, how all the intended details work together [towards] the final outcome. Sonically, I approach the design of this model around a traditional richness and harmonic content rarely achieved with this style of build. The details cannot be overlooked. I utilised my standard 'full tenon' neck with very specific chambering in the lower bout of the body, exploiting a tonal character that I've always heard acoustically, with my ear to the side of the lower shoulder... you know, the 'dog whistle' frequencies; the undetectable ones you never hear when a slab is plugged in. It's the sonic soup only found deep within the instrument I want to hear.

"I lightly chamber and 'open up' the typically dense old-stock mahogany before attaching the tops, only removing enough material in the areas less resonant so that the core of the body actually 'rings' before that top ever goes on. It has a definite effect on the response of the instrument."

Those who value humanity and soul will 'get it', and if you do get it, Gabriel's guitars are a tough bug to shake

When asked how many man-hours go into building these guitars, Gabriel says, "I don't really time my work... and I do not wear a watch!" He's no ordinary guitar builder alright, and this is not your average guitar – nor should it be for the eye-watering price. Although for most of us, ten grand is equivalent to a deposit on a house or a new car, the reality is this instrument was sold to a very lucky customer before we'd finished photographing it. Those who value humanity and soul over laser-like precision will 'get it', and if you do get it, Gabriel's guitars are a tough bug to shake. And if you've assembled a collection containing several boutique electrics and you fancy trading in a handful of very good guitars for one incredibly soulful one, maybe the price tag isn't so far out of reach after all.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT
+ Beautiful tonewoods
+ Nails classic PAF tonality
+ Wonderful chunky neck shape
+ Handmade in the old-school way
– Undoubtedly a huge investment

If you want the rock-star experience, this is it. Aged materials and an old-world ethos make for a guitar with a vintage voice and endless mojo straight out of the shipping container

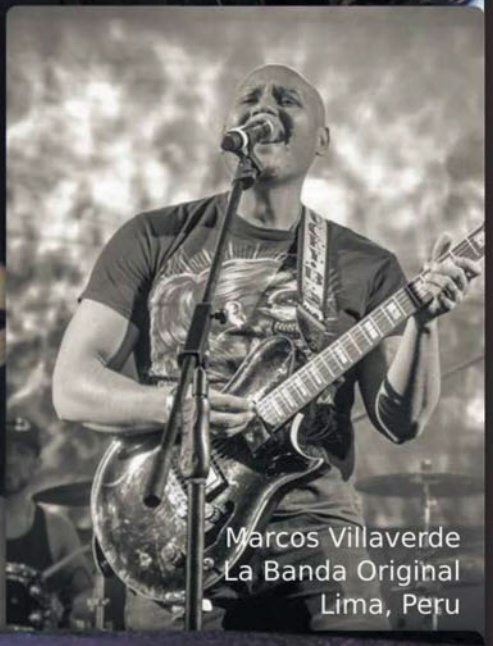
9/10

Jan Akkerman w. Coen Molenaar
Koningsdag Concert, Zwolle

Otto Williams w. Jeffrey Daniel
Shalamar, O2 Arena Newcastle

Florian Friedrich
Sven Ratzke Group

Belvedere Bailey
At Dawn We Attack



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G&L ASAT Classic & Tribute Series ASAT Junior II

Solidbody pioneers George & Leo live on in the familiar silhouette of these two very different guitars. Review by **RICHARD PURVIS**

Thirty years after the launch of the first G&L ASAT, Leo Fender's post-Music Man project is still running – and still looking pretty tidy. These two single-cut solidbodies provide a neat sample of the company's current range of T-types: one a high-end US-made instrument in a fairly traditional style, the other an affordable alternative to the old formula.

First of all, we'll quickly recap the G&L story. The 'G' stands for George Fullerton, Leo's buddy right from the 1940s (he was involved in the design of the Telecaster), through the Music Man years to the birth of G&L at the end of the 70s. The founding partners are no longer with us, but their business has stuck around long enough to win such diverse fans as Peter Green and Jerry 'three signature models' Cantrell.

By the way, contrary to mischievous internet rumour, ASAT doesn't stand for 'almost same as Tele'.

ASAT Classic

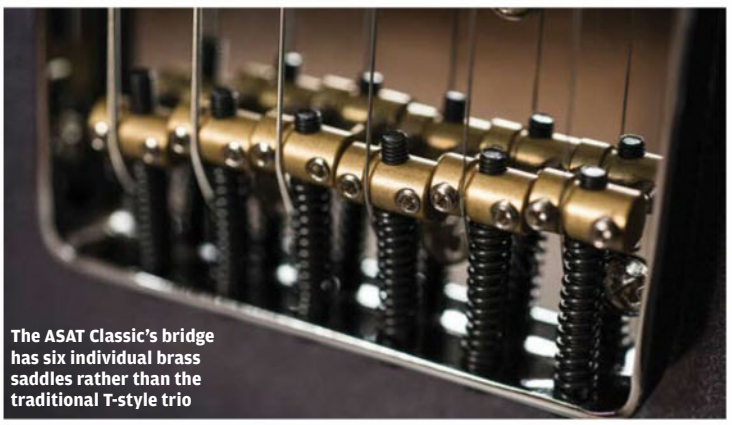
Well, in looks at least, you have to admit this is 'almost same as Tele' – the two main visual differences being the curved top corner of the scratchplate and the slightly fussy shape of the headstock. However, you don't have to look much closer to spot the distinctive polepieces that tell you these are not Fender pickups. They're G&L's ceramic MFD (magnetic field design) pups, designed by Leo himself to produce more output and less background noise than normal single coils.

The bridge has six individual brass saddles, the body is alder (ash is used for the grain-revealing 'premier' finishes), while the bolt-on maple neck has the familiar 25.5-inch scale and a bone nut. It's reasonably chunky, with a sleek satin finish, and the medium jumbo frets have clearly been finished with supreme care. In aesthetic terms, we're not convinced by the gloomy combination of Graphite Metallic, black and rosewood, but your options include mint guards, maple boards and enough body colours to shame Dulux.

In use

This is a fairly weighty guitar that feels comfortable in the hands, as you'd expect from a £1,000+ instrument... but in a solid, functional, non-flash way, as you'd expect from a T-type. >

G&L's ceramic MFD pickups were designed by Leo himself to produce more output and less background noise


The ASAT Classic's bridge has six individual brass saddles rather than the traditional T-style trio

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

G&L ASAT Classic

For a slightly different twist on the old Tele formula, try the **Fender American Elite Series Telecaster £1,389**, which has noiseless single coils; or, for something more familiar, the **American Standard Telecaster £1,159**. The **Fret-King JDD Jerry Donahue £809** is another non-Fender alternative, with Seymour Duncan pickups.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

G&L Tribute Series ASAT Junior II

There aren't many solidbody T-types with P-90s knocking around, but if you're willing to go semi-acoustic, the **Fender Jim Adkins JA-90 £629** is an option. Those who prefer humbuckers have the **Squier Vintage Modified Telecaster Deluxe £330**, while Gibson's latest P-90-packing solidbody is the **SG Naked £979**

Setup straight out of the moulded case is bang-on, and those individual saddles mean minor adjustments to action and intonation can be made without hassle or compromise.

The acoustic voice scores highly for breezy shimmer, but doesn't have a great deal of body – we'll be relying on the extra warmth of the MFD pickups to compensate for that. Are they up to the job?

Plugging into a clean blackface amp, it's immediately obvious that they are. This is a heavyweight tone, and it's downright louder – quite a lot louder – than my American Standard Telecaster. The bridge pup is rich and snarly, the neck unit is bold and jazzy, and the middle setting has a fair amount of country cluck... but no, since you ask, not as much as the Fender. There's more beef in the midrange, but this is at the expense of a little transparency.

And that brings us to the crux of the debate: this is a really nice guitar, and behaves a lot like Leo's original design in most situations, but the high output of those pickups does make a significant difference. If you're looking for a bigger and fuller version of T-style twang, the ASAT Classic is an excellent option; but if you're firmly in the 'Fender got it right first time' school, it probably isn't.

Tribute Series ASAT Junior II

Now we take a leap away from the traditional template, and a substantial drop in budget. G&L's Tribute Series guitars are made in Indonesia; we've met a few of them before and been impressed by their build quality. This one's Junior name gives a clue as to its hybrid nature – taking as much inspiration from Gibson as it does from Fender.

It has the same outline, neck materials and scale length as the American model, but the body is mahogany and the pickups are P-90s, while the TonePros bridge and tailpiece take it even further in the direction of Kalamazoo. Even the pickguard, control knobs and pickup switch are more 'big G' than 'big F'. There's only one colour option, Irish Ale, which on G&L's website looks a lot like Gibson's Wine Red but is very nearly as dark as a pint of slow-poured stout.

There's not a lot of difference between these two G&Ls in terms of feel, though under heavy interrogation we might confess that the Indonesian guitar's frets feel a fraction less smooth. The back of the neck has a glossier finish, with a strong yellow tint, and it's been shaped differently both front and back: the medium C profile is noticeably slimmer, and the rosewood board has a slightly flatter radius (12 inches to the Classic's 9.5).

In use

The acoustic voice is on the light side, but this time with some feisty brashness added to the mids – very punk rock, very 'Junior'. And when we plug in, even to a clean amp, that message is reinforced stridently.

I don't believe I've ever reviewed a P-90-equipped guitar without using the word 'thrap', and I'm not going to break that habit now – because the Junior II's bridge pickup is as thrappy as they come. It's a lively, perky tone with loads of character and a little more bite than the average Les Paul Junior or Special. We're a long way from Tele-land now, though.

All three pickup settings excel with overdrive, from choppy punk riffage (bridge) to smooth and soulful leads (neck) – although, as ever with P-90s, high gain means high background noise. The only way to escape this is to leap into the hum-cancelling centre position – which is a sweetly snappy, perfectly balanced delight.

The Junior's TonePros bridge and tailpiece are departures from the T-style format

KEY FEATURES

G&L ASAT Classic

- **PRICE** £1,387 with hardcase
- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody electric, made in USA
- **BUILD** Alder (as reviewed) or ash body with gloss polyurethane finish; bolt-on maple neck with rosewood (as reviewed) or maple fingerboard with 9.5" radius; 22 medium jumbo frets
- **ELECTRICS** Two MFD (magnetic field design) single-coil pickups, three-way switch, master volume and tone
- **SCALE LENGTH** 648mm/25.5"
- **NECK WIDTH** 41.6mm at nut, 52.5mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 22.5mm at first fret, 25.5mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 35mm at nut, 54mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 4kg/8.8lbs
- **LEFT-HANDERS** Available to order, no extra cost
- **FINISHES** Choice of over 50 colours. Premier finishes £89 extra, metal flake finishes £133 extra
- **CONTACT** Tony Owens Guitars 01925 444696 **www.togs.eu, www.glguitars.com**

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ A powerful alternative to a classic formula
+ Smooth tones in all three positions
+ Lovely neck

- Weighty and not as open-sounding as a Fender Tele

A really nice T-style turned up to 11, or maybe 12 – if you like that idea, you'll love this guitar

8/10

KEY FEATURES

G&L Tribute Series ASAT Junior II

- **PRICE** £410
- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody electric, made in Indonesia
- **BUILD** Mahogany body with gloss polyurethane finish; bolt-on maple neck with rosewood fingerboard, 12" radius; 22 medium jumbo frets
- **ELECTRICS** Two alnico P-90 pickups, three-way switch, master volume and tone
- **SCALE LENGTH** 648mm/25.5"
- **NECK WIDTH** 42.5mm at nut, 53mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 21.5mm at first fret, 23.5mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 36mm at nut, 52mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 3.9kg/8.6lbs
- **LEFT-HANDERS** No
- **FINISHES** Irish Ale only

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Vintage P-90 sounds with some added bite
+ An easy, addictive player
+ A lot of tone for the money

- Comes in only one colour, and it's a dowdy one

As close to an SG Special as it is to a Telecaster, this is an affordable, playable instrument that oozes fun

9/10

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Andrew White Production Series

US luthier Andrew White teams up with Korea's Artec on affordable versions of his hand-built guitars. **HUW PRICE** investigates

Andrew White is a West Virginia-based guitar builder and designer who has been researching and refining acoustic guitar construction for over two decades. His guitars are divided into four distinct series – the Luthier's Collection, the Decker's Creek Series, the Signature Series and the Production Series.

These two guitars are from White's entry-level Production Series. They're made in a purpose-built Korean factory and combine White's custom body style and design concepts with traditional bracing and all-solid tonewoods.

Cybele 100J Jatoba

This is the first time I've played a guitar made from solid jatoba wood, and this one even has a jatoba top. It's a South and Central American timber that's also known as Brazilian cherry. You might assume it's sapele, but the colour is richer and darker. White has gone for an asymmetrical bridge design that may or may not serve a purpose, but certainly looks stylish. The headstock does too, and appears a lot like one of Stefan Sobell's.

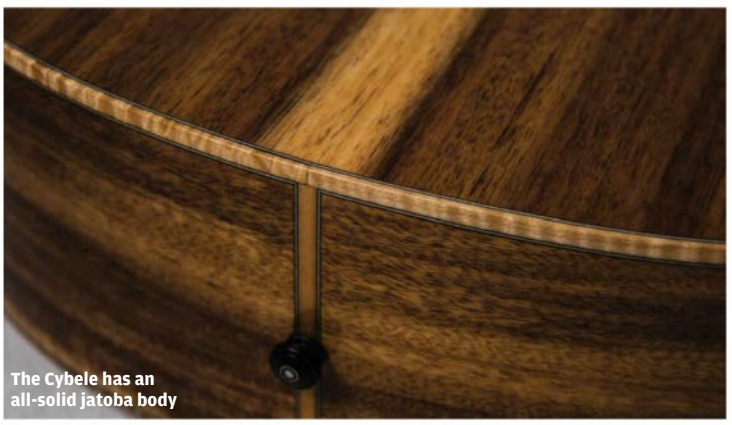
Both of these instruments have Nubone nuts and compensated saddles. The tuners are the sealed type with an 18:1 ratio and black plating, and the frets are medium jumbos.

In use

For a small guitar, the Cybele is surprisingly loud. It doesn't have the pingy brightness of spruce, but it's still plenty bright enough; the treble has some of the rounded and sweetened quality I would associate with a mahogany or koa top. A strum across the strings of an open chord reveals a full and nicely balanced tone. The midrange is prominent and there's a slight volume kick on the B and top E strings. The body also contributes a slightly boxy thump in the low mids that lends a traditional sonic character to this contemporary-looking guitar.

The bass end isn't especially strong, but whether that's down to the body dimensions, the jatoba or both is a matter for conjecture. Although the bass frequencies roll off on the A and low E strings, the notes ring out clearly thanks to the harmonic overtones. This becomes more apparent in dropped tunings as harmonics dominate the fundamental frequency. So, it's a bit >

There is a slightly rough-hewn bark to the sound that works well with Robert Johnson-style bluesy fingerpicking


The Cybele has an all-solid jatoba body

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Cybele 100J Jatoba

The **Breedlove Passport Parlor MH** **£576** is a parlor-sized guitar, with solid mahogany top, laminated mahogany back and sides and a Fishman Isys+ pickup system. **Recording King**'s **ROS-616** **£438** is a 12-fret slot head with an all-solid mahogany body, nitrocellulose finish and bone appointments.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Freja 1020 Natural

The **Larson Bros Maurer Style 2** **£673** has an all-solid 000 body with a spruce and rosewood back and sides. **Guild**'s **M-140E Westerly** **£654** features an all-solid spruce and mahogany body with scalloped X bracing, bone nut and saddle and a Fishman Sonitone pickup system.

like a 'large-bodied' parlor guitar. There is a slightly rough-hewn bark to the sound, that works well with Robert Johnson-style bluesy fingerpicking and hillbilly rhythm work. Playing bottleneck is enjoyable too, although I needed to use a thumb pick to get the bass strings to balance with the trebles.

There's an arid hardness to the tonal quality that's not unlike maple. This, coupled with the fast attack and decay on the low strings, makes some licks sound as if they're being played on a Dobro. Although the Cybele doesn't have an 'expensive' sound, it produces a high-quality tone and it's a whole lot of fun.

Freja 1020 Natural

The choice of blackwood for the back and sides, pau ferro for the bridge and fingerboard and flame maple bindings creates an attractive softer colour palette. I particularly like the rosette, which is described as an "exotic wood circle". The neck is joined to the body by a traditional glued dovetail. Made from Spanish cedar, it has a stacked heel and scarf-jointed headstock. Like the Cybele, it has a gloss body with a satin neck and the build and finish quality are impressive.

In use

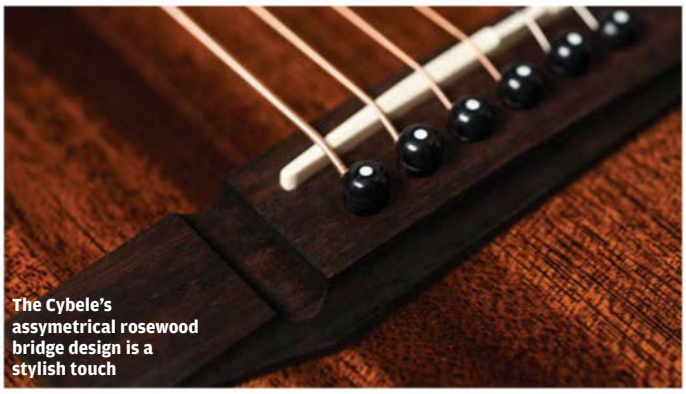
The Freja's medium-depth C-profile neck feels identical to the Cybele's and the tuners are ultra-smooth and precise. The guitar is an all-rounder that's brighter, louder and deeper than the Cybele. The low-mid punch is a common feature, but here it's without boxiness. The sitka spruce top does exactly what you'd expect; there's a lively transient response, a silvery shimmer and plenty of harmonic complexity. So what about the blackwood? I hear some of the depth I'd associate with rosewood, with a warmer woodiness to the up-front midrange that's more mahogany-like. Testing the tap tones, you can work your way along the centre line and play a scale with five distinct notes.

The frequency response more or less tallies with an OM or 000 guitar, particularly the feathery treble that may come courtesy of the scalloped bracing. The bass is focused and proportionate rather than hyped or booming, but it's more woody thrum than pingy twang. In simplified terms, it's like a Martin up-top, with a hint of Gibson J-45 at the bottom and a mixture of both in the middle; I felt equally happy picking out tunes with my fingers and strumming rhythm parts. Although there is plenty of harmonic action, it doesn't clutter up chords, so voicings and grace notes come through clearly. The Freja holds together well in dropped tunings too. I took the low string down to D and C, and it retained its power and definition.

As someone whose first love is the electric, I appreciate an acoustic that doesn't make me work too hard – and I'm not referring to the action. I look for an acoustic that responds to a lighter touch and doesn't have to be played hard before it delivers its true tone. For me, harmonic overtones are the overdrive of the acoustic world, and I appreciate long sustain for soloing. These guitars tick all those boxes with aplomb.

The factory origins become apparent after you've been playing for a while. It's the small details, such as the sharp corners of the nut and saddle, or the way fret buzz accompanies certain notes. To be fair, any issues are minor and most competent DIY-ers could soften those edges with a needle file.

These are fine-sounding guitars with tremendous upgrade potential. The quality of the build is as good as it gets at this price point, and it's always intriguing to hear new tones from unfamiliar timber.



The Cybele's assymetrical rosewood bridge design is a stylish touch

KEY FEATURES

Andrew White Cybele 100J Jatoba

- **PRICE** £500
- **DESCRIPTION** All-solid acoustic guitar, made in Korea
- **BUILD** All-solid jatoba body, Spanish cedar neck, rosewood bridge and oil-finished rosewood fingerboard with rosewood binding, plastic bridge pins, Nubone nut and compensated saddle, black body bindings
- **HARDWARE** Black plated sealed 18:1 tuners
- **LEFT-HANDERS** Yes
- **FINISH** Gloss body with satin neck
- **SCALE LENGTH** 647mm/25.5"
- **NECK WIDTH** 41.5mm at nut, 53mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 21mm at first fret, 22mm at ninth fret
- **STRING SPACING** 35.5mm at nut, 54.5mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 1.9kg/4.1lbs
- **CONTACT** The North American Guitar 0207 835 5597
  www.andrewwhiteguitars.com

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Convincingly retro tone
+ Impressive build quality and finish
+ Easy playability
+ Gorgeous-looking wood

- Lean bass response
- Raw rather than refined tone
- Some fret buzz

Despite the contemporary looks and playing feel, the Cybele does the roots and retro thing particularly well and many will enjoy its rough and ready sonic charm

8/10

KEY FEATURES

Andrew White Freja 1020 Natural

- **PRICE** £649
- **DESCRIPTION** All-solid acoustic guitar, made in Korea
- **BUILD** Solid sitka spruce top with solid blackwood back and sides, Spanish cedar neck, pau ferro bridge and rosewood fingerboard with pau ferro binding, ebony bridge pins with gold rings and pearl dots, Nubone nut and compensated saddle, flame maple body bindings
- **HARDWARE** Black plated sealed 18:1 tuners
- **LEFT-HANDERS** Yes
- **FINISH** Gloss body with satin neck
- **SCALE LENGTH** 647mm/25.5"
- **NECK WIDTH** 41.5mm at nut, 53mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 21mm at first fret, 22mm at ninth fret
- **STRING SPACING** 35.5mm at nut, 54.5mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 2.1kg/4.6lbs

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Full and complex tone
+ Well built and finished
+ Another easy player
+ Attractive timber choices
+ Bass is powerful but not boomy
+ Excellent volume and projection

- High frets feel lumpy
- Minor fret-buzz issues

The Freja 1020 Natural is a beautiful-looking and easy-playing guitar that delivers a full, loud, complex and dynamic tone

9/10

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Guitar & Bass AWARD CHOICE 9/10

Larrivée P-03Z & OM-03WW

The new Special Edition acoustics see Larrivée showcasing some exotic wood choices. **RICK BATEY** puts a pair of them to the test

The latest series of Special Edition Larrivées throw an intriguing new ingredient into the company's usual recipe. That ingredient is timber – a selection of exotic hardwoods from founder Jean Larrivée's personal stash, including zebrano, Peruvian or American walnut, silver oak and swamp ash. The good news is these timbers result in very little upcharge over a standard mahogany/spruce model: just £80 more in the case of the parlor and £150 for the OM.

P-03Z

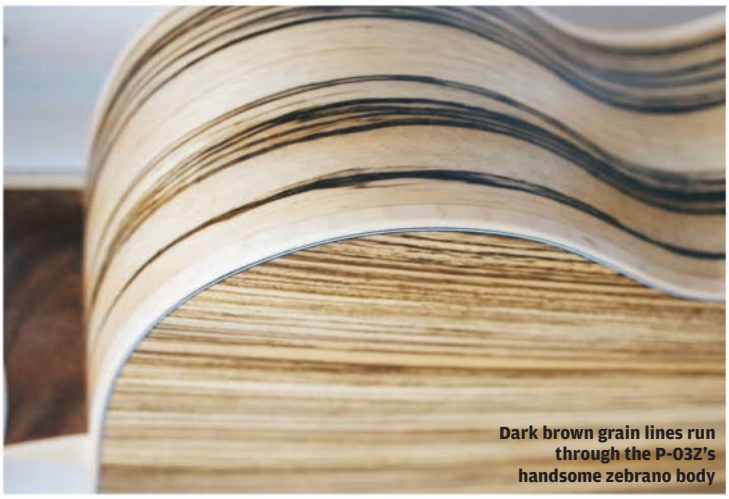
Larrivée's parlor design is a right little charmer. Just 13.25 inches wide, with a 12th-fret neck-to-body join and a scale length of 24 inches, it's very inviting to play. The 'special' wood (also available on the OM-03Z) is zebrano, a lovely timber with an olive or pale coffee hue and dark brown grain lines. Reputed to lie between rosewood and mahogany on the tonal spectrum, it's a promising choice for the back and sides.

The top is solid Canadian sitka spruce, and with its strong, wide-spaced grain it looks like Adirondack. The binding is Canadian maple, the squared-off bridge is rosewood, and the teardrop tortie scratchplate and simple herringbone soundhole rosette add to the clean but nostalgic looks. The finish is satin all over, which suits the guitar's simple appointments down to the ground.

The neck is one piece of mahogany and comes topped with an ebony fingerboard with 18 frets and small pearl dot markers, while the headstock carries a rosewood overlay and six super-smooth sealed tuners. The neck profile is 'modern' rather than 'V-shaped vintage parlor', measuring a bare 20mm deep at the first fret and thickening out to 24mm by the eighth. It's a fast player and the nut width of 1.75 inches (45mm) will suit fingerpickers, although the 56mm string spacing at the bridge is a couple of millimetres shy of the 58mm of the OM on review here.

Many of today's affordable parlor guitars look the part but sound nasal and thin – the price of putting looks and specs above what's on the inside. This is where Larrivée's experience and all-solid wood build come into play, because the sound properly billows out of this little guitar. It's old-timey but sustaining, delicate and responsive, with forward lower mids, a tight bottom end and sweet trebles. The amount of volume is impressive given

The sound properly billows out of this little guitar. It's old-timey but sustaining, delicate and responsive



Dark brown grain lines run through the P-03Z's handsome zebrano body

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

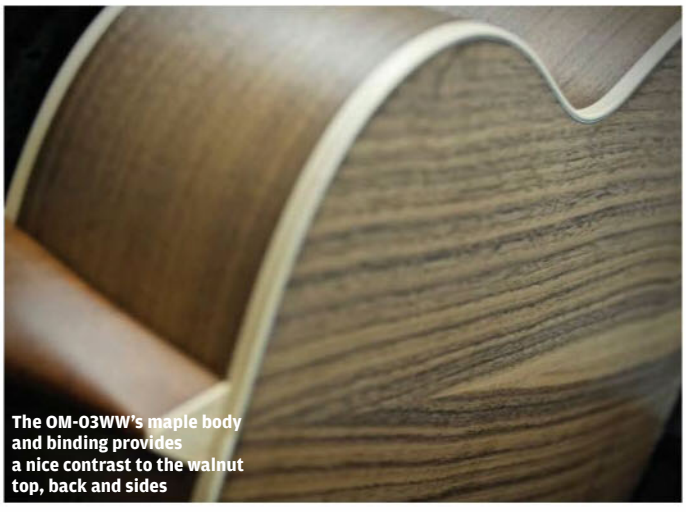
Larrivée P-03Z

The **Taylor GS Mini** **£559** isn't really a parlor, but it makes the most of its weeny 23.5-inch scale, and you can get laminated rosewood or koa versions. The **Simon & Patrick Woodland Pro Parlor Spruce** **£799** is a good-value solid mahogany/spruce parlor. Or if you really feel the call of a 24-inch scale, then the **Collings Baby** from around **£3,000** is one of the ultimate three-quarter-size pickers

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Larrivée OM-03WW

Hardwood-topped OMs are a relatively uncommon breed, but do try the all-mahogany **Martin 000-15M** **£1,099**. Also, check out the **Taylor 322e** **£1,257**, which combines a blackwood back and sides with a mahogany top



The OM-03WW's maple body and binding provides a nice contrast to the walnut top, back and sides

the size of the soundbox; for lyrical fingerpicking or country and blues it's a winner, and it's a fine single-note lead player too.

We might try beefing up the string gauges: swapping from a .053" to a .056" on the bottom would give that string a touch more oomph and authority, as the 24-inch scale leaves it sounding a little light, without quite the impact of the A and D. Our review guitar could do with a touch more neck relief, as the neck is set up quite flat and the low E buzzes with more than a moderate right-hand attack. Larrivée's truss-rod design places the nut in the end block, tucked away behind the transverse brace above the soundhole, but it includes a special wrench in the case pocket so you can make adjustments without removing the strings. Overall, this is a lovely little guitar that delivers in very nearly big-guitar terms.

OM-03WW

The OM-03WW All-American, to give it its full name, is a surprise. The presence of walnut is no great shock, but what raises eyebrows is Larrivée's decision to use it for the top as well as the back and sides. Though we don't know how dense this medium-dark greyish-brown American walnut is, the chances are it's slightly heavier than mahogany, and at nearly 4.5lbs this is not a lightweight guitar. Can Larrivée extract a sound from a hardwood top to compete with traditional spruce?

The short answer is yes, but in an unexpected way. We half-anticipated something quite trebly, perhaps edgy, but the OM-03W delivers natural, unforced highs and a bias towards the bassy end of the spectrum, sounding almost like a baritone. It's very well balanced with almost no midrange kick, but rewards fingerpicking and controlled flat-pick playing rather than all-out attack. Dropped tunings work well, with the full 25.5-inch scale coping fine down as far as C. With very little of that 'hardwood hardness', this is a rich and unusually full-sounding guitar. The fact that at 15.25 inches across the lower bout a Larrivée OM is a quarter of an inch wider than the 'classic' Martin OM – half an inch wider across the upper bout and half an inch deeper at the endpin block, too – helps the size of the sound.

The finish is a faultless satin, and the body and neck binding is contrasting maple; the bridge is a belly design, and the herringbone rosette has gained a couple of outside rings. The one-piece mahogany neck is 45mm wide at the nut, and although it's a millimetre deeper at the nut than the P-03Z, it's a slim, modern shape. The only slight drawback is a little too much of a noticeable edge where the maple binding meets the mahogany. The neck is a little broader at the octave than the parlor's, and by the time we get to the bridge the string spacing is a comfy 58mm. The frets are fitted and finished beautifully, the tuning is smooth and the intonation spot-on.

Larrivée delivers stylishly-designed, cleanly-built guitars. These two are no different, but the timber choices add character in a very welcome way. The all-walnut OM-03WW might not be the ideal strong-arm strummer, but for the fingerpicker it offers an appealing, and different, voice, while the P-03Z is a sweetie which genuinely out-performs its dimensions. All-solid wood guitars with a reputable name, made in California, at this price, with cases? It's hard to say no.

KEY FEATURES

Larrivée P-03Z

- **PRICE** £1,079 inc. case
- **DESCRIPTION** Parlor-sized acoustic, made in California
- **BUILD** Solid African zebra wood back and sides, solid sitka top, maple binding on neck and body, one-piece mahogany neck with 17" to 21" compound radius ebony fingerboard, ebony bridge, ebony headplate, Tusq nut and saddle, herringbone rosette, sealed tuners
- **LEFT-HANDERS** Yes, to order, at no extra cost
- **FINISH** Satin all over
- **SCALE LENGTH** 610mm/24"
- **NECK WIDTH** 45mm at nut, 54mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 20mm at nut, 24mm at eighth fret
- **STRING SPACING** 39mm at nut, 56mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 1.75kg/3.85lbs
- **CONTACT** Sound Technology 01462 480000 **www.soundtech.co.uk**

KEY FEATURES

Larrivée OM-03WW

- **PRICE** £1,249 inc. case
- **DESCRIPTION** OM-sized acoustic, made in California
- **BUILD** Solid American walnut back, sides and top with maple binding, one-piece mahogany neck with 17" to 21" compound radius ebony fingerboard, ebony bridge, ebony headplate, Tusq nut and saddle, herringbone rosette, sealed tuners
- **LEFT-HANDERS** Yes, to order, no extra cost
- **FINISH** Satin all over
- **SCALE LENGTH** 25.5"/650mm
- **NECK WIDTH** 45mm at nut, 55mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 21mm at nut, 23.5mm at ninth fret
- **STRING SPACING** 39mm at nut, 58mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 2kg/4.4lbs

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Great price
+ Large sound for a parlor
+ Wide, shallow neck

- 24-inch scale length not ideal for dropped tunings

The P-03Z squeezes as much sound as possible out of its 24-inch scale. It's a fine recording and sofa guitar. There's a Larrivée parlor on the International Space Station; good choice

9/10

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Again, top value
+ Hard to imagine a better-built £1,000 guitar
+ Different but usable sound
+ Great for tunings and fingerstyle

- Walnut won't be for everyone

More proof that it's worth looking beyond Martin and Taylor if you want a US-built guitar that ticks all the boxes: design, sound, playability and value

8/10

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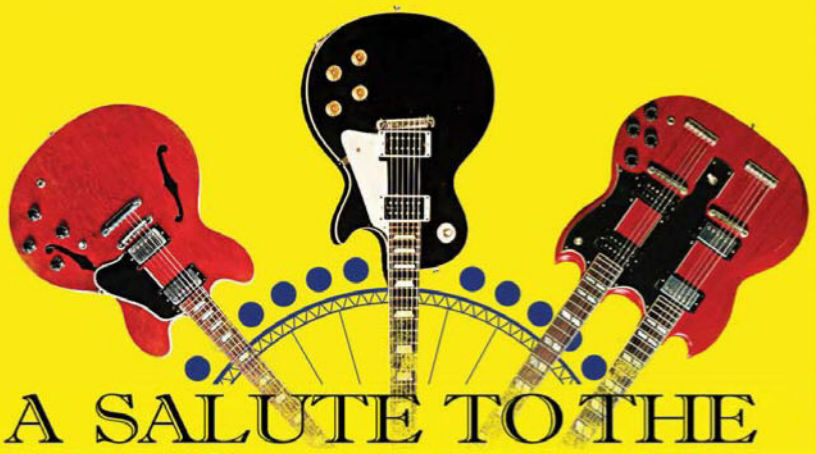

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Ashdown Woodsman Jumbo 65W acoustic combo

Ashdown's Woodsman series comprises three feature-full acoustic combos. **RICK BATEY** flies the Jumbo

Back in 2006, if you wanted to buy an Ashdown acoustic amp you could choose from such models as the 100-watt Radiator 1 (the one with the vertical control panel) and the mighty 160-watt Radiator 2 in various speaker configurations. The Woodsman series for 2016 has three models – the £149 single-channel 25-watt Parlour, the £279 40-watt Classic, and this 65-watt twin-channel Jumbo – so Ashdown's target looks to have shifted subtly towards the home/small gig player. The smaller two amps each have a single eight-inch Celestion plus a tweeter, while our review Jumbo has two eight-inch drivers and a tweeter.

The Jumbo comes covered in brown floral-embossed Western-style vinyl and has smooth-turning knobs and an easy-to-read cream control panel angled at 45 degrees... just the job if you're sitting on a chair with the amp on the floor. The single carry handle is faux leather, and though the amp is fairly lightweight it doesn't hang quite straight, which makes it a little awkward to carry. The lack of corner protection is also a concern.

Feature-wise, the Woodsman Jumbo is very nearly identical to the old Radiator 1. Around the back, we have an XLR and phono outs, an effects loop (arranged pre-reverb), and phono/mini-jack aux inputs. Channel one's combo input can take either a microphone XLR or a phono jack, and offers switchable phantom power; the controls are input gain and shelving bass and treble knobs, offering +/-15dB at 100Hz and 10kHz. Channel two has a phono input, a switch to cope with active or passive pickups, a two-stage green/red clip light, an input gain knob, a shape switch, a phase reverse switch, and simple bass and treble knobs.

Next comes a feedback-busting notch filter section with no 'Q' width control, a knob to cover frequencies from 70Hz to 250Hz, and a level-controllable reverb – with improved algorithms – which offers room and hall options and long/short decay buttons. Finally, there's the master volume. The drawbacks are the lack of a power indicator light; no dedicated midrange control aside from the shape switch, which might be fine if your guitar has onboard EQ, but which could hinder you slightly if not; and the same reverb setting on both channels.

Despite the lack of dedicated mids knobs, we found it easy to get decent tones out of the Woodsman Jumbo. It sounds solid and smooth, and the two eight-inch speakers enable it to fill a fair-sized room. The shape switch offers a preset 'smile' curve, the simplified notch feature is judged nicely, and though there are no chorus or delay options, the reverb adds some space.

The Woodsman Jumbo sounds solid and smooth, and the two eight-inch speakers enable it to fill a fair-sized room

The Woodsman Jumbo is joined by some impressively-featured big-name amps at this price point before you make the jump to one of the bigger Fishmans or smaller Schertlers, but it's a fair-sounding, easy-to-use unit.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Solid sound
+ Useful phantom power
+ Simple notch filter works well

- Reverb not channel-assignable
- No chorus or delay effects
- Handle placement less than ideal
- No corner protection
- No front panel 'on' light

The flagship Woodsman follows closely the familiar Radiator 1, but with less power, an extra speaker and a more convenient control panel. Hardly a great leap forward, but it does sound good

6/10

KEY FEATURES

Ashdown Woodsman Jumbo

- **PRICE** £369
- **DESCRIPTION** Two-channel acoustic/vocal amp, made in China
- **POWER RATING** 65W
- **FRONT PANEL** Channel one: XLR/phone input w/phantom power, volume, bass, treble; channel two: active/passive phono input, clip light, volume, phase/shape buttons, bass, treble; notch filter with in/out switch and freq knob; reverb knob, hall/plate and long/short buttons; master volume
- **REAR PANEL** Power switch, mini-jack and phono aux inputs, FX send/return, XLR out
- **SPEAKERS** 2x8" Celestions, plus tweeter
- **DIMENSIONS** 480x355x230mm
- **WEIGHT** 12kg/26.4lbs
- **CONTACT** ashdownmusic.com

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

The **50W Marshall AS50D £419** is a 2x8 with tweeter, and has reverb and chorus assignable. The **Fender Acoustasonic 90 £310** has 90 watts into a 1x8 with tweeter and has independent effects. The **Roland AC-60 £439** is a stereo 2x30W amp with two 6.5-inch speakers and impressive spec.

Stone Deaf pedals

Did someone say Stone Deaf? After a few days with four feisty Brit stompers, **RICHARD PURVIS** isn't far off...

There's a boutique stompbox boom going on, and it isn't happening only in America. Indie makers on this side of the pond are also doing their bit to bring some quirky colour to the world's pedalboards, and Stone Deaf's Oldham-built units are every bit as intriguing on the inside as they are brassy on the outside – just ask Josh Homme, a fan of the Stone Deaf PDF-1. On review here are four pedals, all with an element of distortion/fuzz involved. Each has dual footswitches, an expression pedal input and parametric EQ controls: a recipe for much more flexibility than the average filth generator.

KEY FEATURES

Kliptonite

- **PRICE** £165
- **DESCRIPTION** Two-channel parametric fuzz/drive pedal, made in UK
- **CONTROLS** Cut/boost, balance, frequency, mirror mix, fuzzy drive, five-way rotary bandwidth switch, channel and bypass footswitches
- **FEATURES** TRS expression pedal input for frequency control, true bypass, powered by 9v battery or DC adaptor (not supplied)
- **DIMENSIONS** 156mm(d) x113mm(w)x78mm(h)
- **CONTACT** 01706 882486 **www.stonedeaffx.com**

This lurid green stompbox sets the tone with its chunky build, retro sci-fi graphics and unconventional controls. It's an overdrive and fuzz in one, with a mirror mix knob that gives you the option of blending the two and switching between 'mostly drive' and 'mostly fuzz'. The top-left control lets you cut or boost the signal over a limited range, which is set by the frequency dial and five-way bandwidth switch.

The overdrive is as smooth and furry as the fuzz is wild and sputtery, yet they're both likeable sounds. It's a pity you can't set different gain levels for the two channels, or tone down the vicious gating effect on the fuzz, but the parametric EQ circuit allows a huge range of voicings for both. And if you have an expression pedal (or a dextrous foot to play with the frequency control), the Kliptonite goes even further: at minimum bandwidth and maximum cut, you can get something like a phaser effect, and at full boost it's somewhere between a wah and a malfunctioning death ray.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Sweet drive and lunatic fuzz in one box
+ Massive tonal flexibility
+ Usable wah/phaser effects with expression pedal

– Fuzz gate can be frustrating

A real maverick pedal, though its overdrive channel will probably get the most use

8/10

KEY FEATURES

Fig Fumb

- **PRICE** £175
- **DESCRIPTION** Parametric high-gain fuzz pedal, made in UK
- **CONTROLS** Cut/boost, balance, frequency, gate, fuzz, five-way rotary bandwidth switch, gate on/off and bypass footswitches
- **FEATURES** TRS expression pedal input for frequency control, true bypass, powered by 9v battery or DC adaptor (not supplied)
- **DIMENSIONS** 156mm(d) x113mm(w)x78mm(h)

Odd name, eh? Stone Deaf says it's an anagram, but we're stumped. Bug Miff? Mig Buff? In fact, as you can probably guess by the number of controls, the Fig Fumb is way more versatile than Electro-Harmonix's best-loved fuzzbox. It does start out in the same ballpark, though: compared to the spitting, squelching Kliptonite this is a much more musical kind of fuzz. And this time, as there's no second channel to worry about, you do get a threshold control for the noise gate – plus the option of bypassing it completely.

The Fig Fumb might never get quite as silky as a vintage Big Muff, but it's not far off; and while the complex inter-dependency of all those controls can take a while to master, a fair approximation of pretty much every classic fuzz tone you can imagine is in here somewhere. That does include Fuzz Factory-style 'Velcro' noises at some settings – and not always the settings you'd expect – but at heart this is a more manageable beast than its sibling the Kliptonite. And yes, it also does the phaser/wah/death-ray thing.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Rich fuzz with gallons of gain on tap
+ Offers an impressive range of tones
+ Can also do wah/phaser-style effects

– Controls can be confusing

A whole host of tasty fuzz tones, from psychedelic to psychotic, in one box

8/10

KEY FEATURES

PDF-2

- **PRICE** £139
- **DESCRIPTION** Two-channel EQ, boost and overdrive pedal, made in UK
- **CONTROLS** Height, gain, frequency, five-way rotary bandwidth switch, channel and bypass footswitches
- **FEATURES** TRS expression pedal input for frequency control, true bypass, powered by 9v battery or DC adaptor (not supplied)
- **DIMENSIONS** 150mm(d) x90mm(w)x77mm(h)

Guitar AWARD CHOICE 9/10

This one's slightly smaller than the other three, so you get only four controls and there's no room for a side-mounted battery compartment – you have to unscrew the base instead. Queens Of The Stone Age star Josh Homme apparently uses two PDF-1s in place of his old Maestro MPF-1 parametric filter. He might need to pop back to Oldham for an upgrade, because the PDF-2 is claimed to be less noisy as well as more versatile than the original.

It's all about EQ filtering and overdrive, and while the controls can initially be confusing, they run on the same principles as the two fuzzes. On the clean channel, with bandwidth set to max, you can get something like a full-frequency boost by cranking the height control; tighten up the bandwidth and the frequency dial comes into play, allowing you to apply extreme cut or boost to any frequency range. Switching channels brings the gain control into the equation; this ranges from beefy medium-gain overdrive to something not far short of full-on fuzz.

Guitar VERDICT

+ Chunky overdrive and clean boost
+ Excellent, versatile alt.rock tones
+ Creative filtering options

– Dirty channel can be quiet at low gain

The least wacky of these four boxes, but arguably the most musical – and still hugely versatile

9/10

KEY FEATURES

Trashy Blonde

- **PRICE** £165
- **DESCRIPTION** Two-channel parametric distortion pedal, made in UK
- **CONTROLS** Cut/boost, balance, frequency, mix, trash, five-way rotary bandwidth switch, channel and bypass footswitches
- **FEATURES** TRS expression pedal input for frequency control, true bypass, powered by 9v battery or DC adaptor (not supplied)
- **DIMENSIONS** 156mm(d) x113mm(w)x78mm(h)

If you've ever found your amp to be too clean and polite then the Trashy Blonde is just the ticket. This is raucous, JMP and JCM800-style British overdrive and distortion that some may find initially a little ferocious in the high end. However, thanks to those unorthodox but limitlessly flexible controls – including a handy clean/dirty mix knob – it can be as thin, fat, bright or soft-edged as you like. In the mood for something subtle? Set the cut/boost control just a twitch away from noon, tweak the frequency dial to find the range you want to play with, then use the bandwidth switch to select the focus of the effect.

This works even better on the clean channel – despite some slight reservations about the noise floor, you might well use the Trashy Blonde as an always-on EQ improver to correct a dull, honky or spiky guitar, with the ability to switch in some fearsome distortion as an additional bonus. You might even find that it kicks two existing pedals off your board or acts as a 'Marshalliser' in combination with a blackface Fender amp.

Guitar VERDICT

+ A genuine two-channel unit
+ Massive tonal flexibility
+ Yep... wah and phase is on offer

– Brit crunch tones aren't for everyone

Only as trashy as you want it to be, this one's every bit as useful clean as it is dirty

8/10

Guitar & Bass AWARD CHOICE 9/10

Supro Drive, Fuzz & Boost

Having revived its amp range, Supro turns its attention to a new line of stompboxes. **RICHARD PURVIS** takes them for a test drive...

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Drive

An equally fine attempt at squeezing the essence of a high-end amplifier into a stompbox is the tweedy **Lazy J Cruiser £240**, with separate controls for drive and boost. The **Red Witch Famulus £189** is a luxury dirtbox from New Zealand with two different overdrive voices, while the **Pigtronix FAT Drive £139** is another with an 18-volt option, plus a lethal 'more' switch.

Fuzz

The current Dunlop range of round-cased filth-generators includes the **Germanium Fuzz Face Mini £124**, with slightly mismatched transistors; alternatively, get maximum buzz for your buck with the super-smooth **Electro-Harmonix Big Muff Pi £63** – or, for ultimate versatility (and lunacy), try the **Z.Vex Vexter Fuzz Factory £129**.

Boost

The most obvious rival to the Supro Boost is the **Seymour Duncan Pickup Booster £109**, which also has two tone-tweaked settings; the **Yerasov Beige Bug £79** goes a step further with adjustable treble and bass attenuation. The **Vertex Boost £209** has an expression pedal input for volume swells.

Supro is a brand that used to have near-mythical status. You'd see the blue/silver amps in photos from the 60s and, if you were lucky, you'd meet someone who'd met someone who'd spotted one once in an American junkshop, hidden under a duvet of cobwebs. But then, a little over two years ago, Pigtronix owner Absara Audio decided this was a name worthy of reviving. We're glad it did.

The reborn Supro amps sound as meaty as they look, and we can't deny our tails had a bit of a wag when an expansion into the stompbox market was announced at the NAMM show back in January. There are three pedals, all with their origins in amp-like sounds – no stereo flangers or ring modulators here (at least not for now) – and the colours are in keeping with the look of the amplifiers.

Assembled in New York State using brushed aluminium enclosures with clever side-mounted battery compartments, they're compact pedals but unusually tall – almost three inches including the knobs. The knobs also match those used on the amps, with tiny white markers that aren't exactly super-easy to see; and, as if they weren't intriguing enough already, each unit has an expression pedal input. What for? We'll soon find out.

Drive

Just as the original Marshall Guv'nor was intended to give you the sound of a JCM800 in a pedal, this little blue cutey claims to recreate the circuitry of a Supro amp 'from end to end'. Well, the company seems to have forgotten the valves, but what you do get is a real output transformer. What's more, it's coil-tapped so you can switch between high-headroom 'bold' sounds and a more compressed 'rich' option. If you don't think that's an interesting idea, put down this magazine at once.

Things start happening about 10 o'clock, and the distortion is as smooth and furry as a bucket of chinchillas

The volume, gain and tone controls are pretty self-explanatory; if you have a TRS-wired expression pedal, you can use it to override the gain knob, allowing you to ramp up the distortion discreetly, rather than discretely, mid-solo. Like all the Supro pedals, it comes with a nine-volt battery, but the DC socket also takes anything up to 18 volts – extending our headroom options even further.

In use

We begin with the gain at zero, and by crikey we're tempted to leave it there. Setting the transformer to bold, we get just a smidgen of dirt and a distinct thickening of the mids; flick it to rich and the result is a smoother crunch with the mids flattened out and more fizz in the top end. These are highly musical, highly usable sounds, and we didn't even realise we'd started yet.

Now push that gain knob towards noon and things get quite peppy, but it's still solid and controlled, with no obvious effect on playing dynamics at all. Is it like the overdrive you get from the output stage of a valve amp? Well, yes, and we have to say it's pretty Supro-like in its rich, throaty character.

Cranking the gain dollops on more entertainment, all the way up to full blast; by now, the difference made by the transformer tap is less obvious, but there's still more compression in rich

mode and more midrange bark in bold – perfect for old-fashioned lead work on a Les Paul's bridge pickup. Just about everything this box does sounds great… and plugging in an 18-volt power supply does indeed bring a chunk of extra power to what is already a swinging party.

Oh, and we almost forgot the expression pedal input. With a suitable pedal plugged in, you can set the minimum gain level with a trimpot inside the Drive and the maximum with the control on the top – then dial the heavy overdrive in and out with a flick of the ankle. This might not be a feature that every owner ends up using on a regular basis, but it's a lot easier than fiddling with your guitar's volume knob mid-solo.

Fuzz

Supro's reference points here are the Big Muff, Tone Bender and Fuzz Face: pretty much the holy trinity of vintage fuzz. It uses a combination of germanium and silicon transistors, and has a two-knob EQ section; this time, your expression pedal can be used to adjust the treble.

In use

We didn't enjoy the sound of this one at low gain levels, but then of course low gain is not the reason you buy a fuzzbox, is it? Things start happening round about 10 o'clock on the dial, and when the distortion comes it's as smooth and furry as a bucket of chinchillas. Don't expect tonal transparency or aggressive bite here – your guitar's midrange spikes are gone, replaced by the 'boopy' signature of a classic fuzz with whispery top and ample bottom.

Winding up the gain has the same effect as on the Drive pedal and, again, upping the voltage to 18 gives the sound more solidity – though in this case you might not be glad of it. This unit never quite hits the violin-like eternal sustain of a good Muff, but the EQ controls give it much more versatility than most vintage fuzzes. Try putting it after a clean boost in your effects chain to really sharpen up the treble response.

Boost

Speaking of clean boosts… finally we come to the one-knob wonder, a JFET-based device with a bright white LED and a simple promise to drive the front end of your amp harder. Aside from the volume control (up to 20dB), there's a three-way mini toggle switch that allows you to engage either of two filters: high pass and low pass, for a little bit of tone-shaping.

In use

We're hoping for a transparent gain-hike, and that's what we get. Actually, with volume at zero what we get is silence – not much use on its own, but this allows the Boost to provide full-range volume swells when paired with an expression pedal. 'Boosted' volume matches the bypass signal at around 11 o'clock, and it does feel ever so slightly brighter (and hissier) than the untreated signal, though that's hardly noticeable. From there on up, it's pure gain all the way.

The passive tone filters feel counterintuitive at first – you're adding gain then taking some of it away again – but both have been judged tastefully and certainly have their uses. Pushing an amp into overdrive can easily turn humbuckers bloomy, or single coils spiky, and this is a simple way to cut out either problem without sabotaging your fundamental tone.

KEY FEATURES

Supro Drive

- **PRICE** £169
- **DESCRIPTION** Overdrive pedal, made in USA
- **CONTROLS** Volume, gain, tone, bold/rich transformer toggle switch; true bypass footswitch; inputs for TRS expression pedal and 9-18v power supply
- **DIMENSIONS** 66mm(w)x66mm(d) x119mm(h)
- **CONTACT** John Hornby Skewes 01132 865381
  www.jhs.co.uk
  www.suprousa.com

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Musical, amp-like overdrive
+ Transformer tap switch adds an extra dimension
+ Nifty 'gain swell' feature (if you have an expression pedal)
+ Sounds even better with an 18v power supply

- White knob markers are a bit small

It won't flatter your playing, but this ingenious little overdrive sounds all kinds of lovely

9/10

KEY FEATURES

Supro Fuzz

- **PRICE** £159
- **DESCRIPTION** Fuzz pedal, made in USA
- **CONTROLS** Volume, gain, bass, treble; true bypass footswitch; inputs for TRS expression pedal and 9-18v power supply
- **DIMENSIONS** 66mm(w)x66mm(d) x119mm(h)

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Delivers thick and creamy vintage filth
+ More tonally versatile than most fuzzes
+ Cleans up musically with your guitar's volume control

- Those titchy knob markers may again prove frustrating in live use

Well thought out and great fun… though it's coming in near the top end of a fairly crowded market

8/10

KEY FEATURES

Supro Boost

- **PRICE** £159
- **DESCRIPTION** Boost pedal, made in USA
- **CONTROLS** Volume, bright/neutral/dark toggle switch; true bypass footswitch; inputs for TRS expression pedal and 9-18v power supply
- **DIMENSIONS** 66mm(w)x66mm(d) x119mm(h)

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Provides up to 20dB of uncoloured boost
+ Shrewdly judged tone filters
+ Handy for volume effects with an expression pedal

- Quite pricey for a relatively straightforward device

It may not appear sexy, but this is a nicely designed unit that's excellent for getting the most out of an 'on the edge' amp

8/10

D'Angelico NEW YORK

Founded in 1932 by master-luthier John D'Angelico in New York City, D'Angelico Guitars is revered for making some of the finest archtop and semi-hollow guitars in history. Now seen in the hands of iconic artists and on the world's largest stages, D'Angelico has returned to produce stunning, diverse lines of exceptionally-crafted instruments.

With a Standard Series comprised of electric archtops, solidbodies, and basses in every shape and size to an Acoustic Series featuring both flattops and original John D'Angelico designs, D'Angelico Guitars offers diverse lines of the utmost quality.

And brand new for 2016, D'Angelico has announced its return to building guitars in New York City with the Master Builder Series comprised entirely of hand-made custom archtops made by a single luthier. Committed to the legacy of our name, we at D'Angelico Guitars promise to honor our roots while building ambitiously towards the future.

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Guitar & Bass AWARD CHOICE 9/10

Electro-Harmonix 22500 Dual Stereo Looper

EHX's new looper crams a vast range of functions into a compact pedal. **GARY WALKER** gets lost in an infinite loop...

Electro-Harmonix's 22500 does for the concept of looping what its Super Pulsar did for tremolo: takes all the functions you'd expect to find and multiplies that number by a factor of 10 – then adds a few more for good measure. This dual stereo looper is packed to the metaphorical rafters with ingenious and useful features.

We get a pair of loop circuits that can be independent or locked together, parallel or sequential – enabling you to switch between verse and chorus sections. Each has a volume knob and record, play and memory lights, and can be reversed or switched up or down an octave; there's an overdub facility with adjustable feedback level and an undo/redo function that will, at least initially, be your friend. The 100 preset banks should be more than adequate for your looping needs, and a rear-loading 8GB SDHC memory card is included.

Not a bad start, and there's more, including a rhythm section with 16 drum loops – making the 22500 an inviting prospect both as a songwriting tool for solo artists and for players wanting something with a little more 'humanity' than a metronome to practice with. An optional external footswitch enables you to scroll through the loop banks while playing, and there are a pair of guitar in/outs and an XLR input with phantom power for microphones, and a USB port for transporting loops to or from a computer.

In use

The 22500's 36-page instruction manual is a place where weekends go to die, so we just dived in. Within 10 minutes were lost in a huge, unsettling mess of chords, octave-up and -down arpeggios and reversed overdubs – topped off by a very loud, out-of-time drum beat. The whole thing was reminiscent of a bad trip in a field in Somerset.

So, you'll need to read the manual, and the first thing you'll have to get to grips with is the mode selection knob. Pressing it once engages it, and turning it scrolls through the eight modes: bank, loop, overdub, trigger, rhythm tempo, rhythm type, rhythm level and erase. Pressing it again engages that setting. This isn't a very intuitive system and you can end up changing the rhythm tempo, or moving to another bank when all you wanted to do was tweak the rhythm volume. For live use, we'd have liked to be able to switch through the loops – without shelling out for the external footswitch.

Explaining all of the looping modes would fill the rest of this issue, but in short they can be independent in freeform mode or locked together, and quantized in relation to the built-in rhythms, and parallel or sequential. There's also a one-shot mode and a trigger function to start recording automatically when you play. Within quantize mode, you can have either 2/4, 3/4, 4/4 or 6/8 bar lengths or the 'expert' quantize to the beat setting.

While the rhythm sounds aren't exactly like being backed by an electronic Steve Gadd, they're a useful feature, and you can use the SD card to import your own.

We were massively impressed by the 22500 and lost a weekend exploring its huge range of functions. For those seeking a simple looper, it may feel like a complex and fairly expensive case of over-egging the pudding, and those needs may be met by EHX's smaller Nano Looper 360. However, we can see the 22500 being enormously useful in a range of playing scenarios.

We were massively impressed by the 22500 and lost a weekend exploring its huge range of functions

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

If you want a lengthy feature list, it's hard to beat the **Pigtronix Infinity Looper £319**. **TC Electronic**'s **Ditto X4 Looper £189** has two loop tracks and a simple interface, and the **Boss RC-3 Loop Station £139** crams three hours' stereo recording time into a pedalboard-friendly enclosure.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Huge range of features
+ Rhythm function is useful
+ Reverse and octave settings are fun, creative tools
+ 100 banks and SD card give huge scope
- Mode selection knob is fiddly

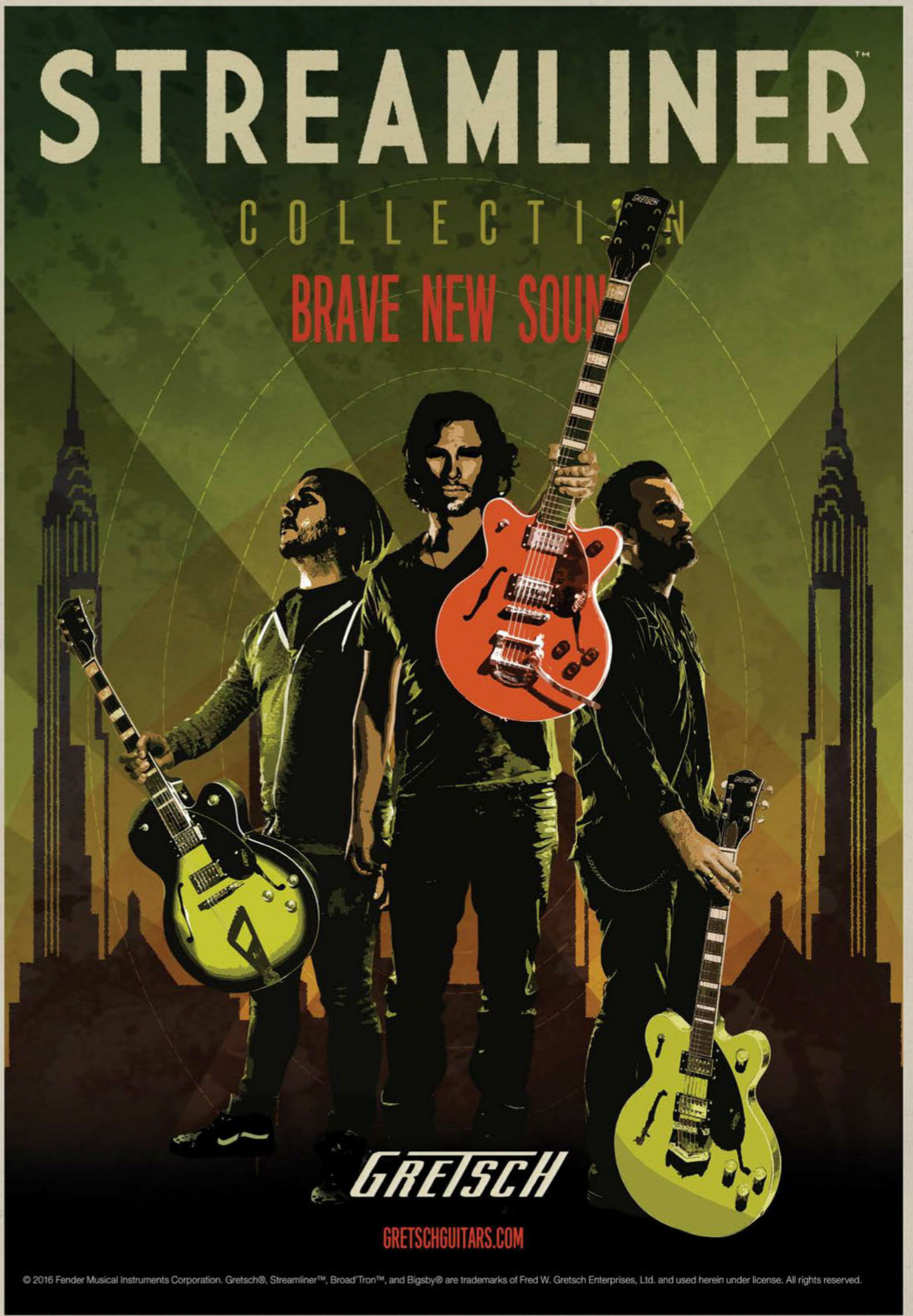
EHX takes looping to the next level. A wonderfully clever creative tool.

9/10

KEY FEATURES

Electro-Harmonix 22500 Dual Stereo Looper

- **PRICE** £215
- **DESCRIPTION** Dual stereo looper pedal with reverse and octave functions, rhythm loops, tap tempo, USB port, 8GB SDHC card and optional external loop up/down footswitch (£69). Powered by 9.6V DC power supply (included)
- **CONTROLS** Loop A and B, volume, input gain, mode and mic trim knobs, loop A and B and stop/tap footswitches, 2x reverse, 2x octave, rhythm and tap on buttons, phantom power toggle switch
- **DIMENSIONS** 146x121x64(mm)
- **CONTACT** ehx.com



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Ashdown B-Social

The appetite for 'living room' amps with wireless connectivity continues to grow. **GARETH MORGAN** checks out Ashdown's B-Social

Bass combos designed for home use may have been getting smaller and lighter in recent years, but this has also gone hand-in-hand with an increase in output power, as evidenced by the excellent PJB Double Four and Markbass Micromark. The latest addition to the pack is the Ashdown B-Social, but it promises to deliver much more than just home-friendly amplification for practice sessions.

Made in China, the stylish B-Social is housed in a compact black vinyl-covered plywood box that's available with a black, white or natural wood high-gloss front panel. As well as traditional jack and mini jack inputs, you can connect wirelessly via Bluetooth or courtesy of the supplied plug-in transmitter. There's also a micro USB port for PC or Mac recording and an AppTek mini jack socket (cable supplied), which enables you to process and effect your tone via the AmpKit amp and effects simulation app for iOS.

Framed by two top-mounted chrome carry handles, the B-Social's control panel is split into two sections. The left 'instrument' side is served by four (two passive and two active) input jack sockets mounted on the side panel, split into two channels – each with an input volume so you and a guitarist buddy can engage in low-volume jam sessions. Bass, middle, treble and master volume controls are provided, and these are mirrored in the right-hand audio section. This side is used for Bluetooth-connected devices or those hardwired through the Line In mini jack. Stereo speaker output jack sockets mean you can even connect extension cabs for small gigs/rehearsals, while a global mute button ensures that when using it as a recording interface you don't have to listen to a laggy signal.

The wireless transmitter is easy to set up and works well, and Bluetooth connectivity is excellent. Together with the Line In signals, this funnels through the audio section, where the same EQ controls can be used. We found that resorting to EQ wasn't a regular necessity; The B-Social's audio-balanced circuitry ensures that both wireless and wired devices in pure form sound good through the onboard drivers.

The onboard EQ is nicely attenuated, so the bass dial fattens without overcooking

In use

Stripped back to its basics, this is a decent little desktop combo with a well-realised clean tone, provided you don't overload the bottom end of your bass. The onboard EQ is nicely attenuated, so the bass dial fattens without overcooking, middle induces a pleasing, snappy punch and boosting treble adds more than enough cut and bite for aggressive intent. So far, so good.

The AppTek feature opens up a world of possibilities for the tech-savvy, and happily Ashdown makes using it easy via the supplied cable. Amp and pedal emulations need to be purchased separately but fresh out of the box, the B-Social gives you a lot more for your money than just a practice amp.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Versatile and compact
+ Loaded with practical features
+ Simple, easy-to-use EQ
+ Wireless and Bluetooth connectivity work seamlessly

- No speaker cone protection
- AppTek feature currently works only with Apple devices

A stylish, high-tech small combo for home practice, jamming, small gigs, recording and much, much more

9/10

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

If you don't require the array of connectivity options and technical capability, there are some really good alternatives. The 70-watt **PJB Double Four £379** is ultra compact and sounds excellent, courtesy of a highly-musical EQ, two four-inch speakers and a passive low-frequency radiator. A serious contender. **Markbass' Micromark 801 £369** is a top-notch 60-watt unit that'll power an extension cab and has an Aux In for jamming. Or how about the **Roland Cube Bass RX £209**? It has a quartet of four-inch speakers, eight COSM amps and six digital effects.

KEY FEATURES

Ashdown B-Social

- **PRICE** £599
- **DESCRIPTION** 75-watt desktop studio/home amplification combo with one instrument and one audio channel, PC, Mac, Bluetooth, wireless (transmitter supplied), AppTek and Line In connectivity. Sealed plywood cabinet with two custom 5" speakers.
- **CONNECTIONS** Two active and two passive and stereo extension, speaker jack sockets, Line In, Line Out and headphone mini jack sockets, AppTek four-pole mini jack socket (cable supplied), micro USB socket (cable supplied)
- **CONTROLS** Input 1, Input 2, 2x bass, middle, treble and volume. Speaker mute and wireless/Bluetooth on/off and catch buttons
- **DIMENSIONS** 255x370x205mm
- **WEIGHT** 7.6kg/16.7lbs
- **CONTACT** Ashdown Engineering 01245 441155 **www.ashdownmusic.com**

Six of the best

Gone are the days of cheese-grater playability and actions you could limbo dance beneath; you don't have to spend big to sound great...

Fender Sonoran SCE

PRICE £280 **CONTACT** www.fender.com

No shrinking violet, this cool candy-coloured acoustic will get you noticed all right, but while its stylings seem perfect for a beachside strum, there's much more to this instrument than that. With a solid spruce top and laminated mahogany back and sides, the precisely-constructed Sonoran has a comfy C-profile maple neck with which Strat players will feel instantly at home. Its acoustic voice is pleasantly full-bodied, and it's also stage-ready with a pair of strap buttons and a Fishman Isys III active preamp and tuner installed.

The precisely-constructed Sonoran has a comfy C-profile maple neck with which Strat players will feel instantly at home

Epiphone FT-350SCE

PRICE £459 **CONTACT** www.epiphone.com

If the prospect of an acoustic guitar with an automatic tuning system sounds like witchcraft then look away now, but if you think it would be just the ticket for adventures in altered and open tunings then Epiphone might just have the guitar for you. Along with Min-ETune technology, the FT-350SCE comes loaded with a Shadow NanoFlex undersaddle pickup and ePerformer preamp, yet for all this electronic wizardry, the 'burst finish and tortoiseshell scratchplate give this cutaway electro a classic visual vibe.

Sigma 000M-15

PRICE £249 **CONTACT**
www.westsidedistribution.com

Though the inspiration behind this all-mahogany six-string is blindingly obvious, the recently-rejuvenated Sigma brand was first established by Martin in 1970 to combat the wave of Japanese copies that hit the market in the late 1960s. Although it's now owned by AMI of Germany, Sigma's Martin heritage is still clear for all to see. With a solid top, laminate sides and an outrageous price tag, the 000M-15 ranks among the guitar bargains of the decade and, when paired with a fine set of strings, punches way beyond its weight category, especially in the studio.

Seagull S6 Original Burnt Umber Q1T

PRICE £449 **CONTACT**
www.seagullguitars.com

Benefiting from a brand refresh for 2016, this latest S6 dreadnought from Seagull is a wonderful synthesis of retro and contemporary design. A real looker in semi-gloss Burnt Umber, the guitar's solid spruce top, wild cherry back and sides and silver leaf maple neck combine to give it a big voice with rootsy, mellow undertones that will only develop further over time. The EPM-designed under-saddle pickup and Godin Q1T preamp system combine to offer very good plugged-in performance too.

Yamaha F310

PRICE £97 **CONTACT** uk.yamaha.com

Available in Natural, Cherry Sunburst and Tobacco Brown finishes, this is many a player's first acoustic, and its 25-inch scale and slim neck profile make it less daunting for fledgling guitarists and those with small hands. For the more experienced among you looking for a knockabout acoustic with a level of quality that far exceeds expectations in the sub-£100 price bracket, this is it. To upgrade to a solid sitka spruce top, nato back and sides and 90-degree non-scalloped bracing inspired by the flagship L Series guitars, check out the FG720S – still a steal at £247.

Taylor GS Mini

PRICE £620 (including ES-Go pickup system)
CONTACT www.taylorguitars.com

If you think that travel guitars prioritise portability over playability and tone, be prepared to think again. This downsized grand symphony acoustic has a cult following thanks to its larger-than-life depth and projection from a solid sitka spruce or mahogany top and laminate sapele back and sides, while Taylor's considerable acoustic-building expertise means that cost savings never feel like corners cut. Buy it with Taylor's ES-Go magnetic soundhole pickup and you'll have a compact and enviable set-up for small gigs and open-mic nights.

TALKING 'SHOP

THE FULL MONTY

Matt Gleeson of Monty's Guitars makes some of the world's finest electric guitar pickups. *G&B* paid him a visit...

Story **Chris Vinnicombe** | Photography **Joe Supple**

Matt Gleeson is no stranger to the pages of *Guitar & Bass*, and with good reason. Our very own Huw Price rates Matt's Monty's PAF replicas as the closest thing he's heard to vintage Gibson originals, so when we were invited down to the Monty's Guitars HQ in Acton to learn how a great pickup is made, we jumped at the chance.

Matt's adventures in luthiery and repair began in the early 2000s at Chandler's in Kew, where he learned from the vastly experienced likes of Charlie Chandler, Brinsley Schwarz, Ian Allerton and Paul Herman. And with the likes of David Gilmour and Pete Townshend regularly coming into the repair shop, he was in good company from the get-go.

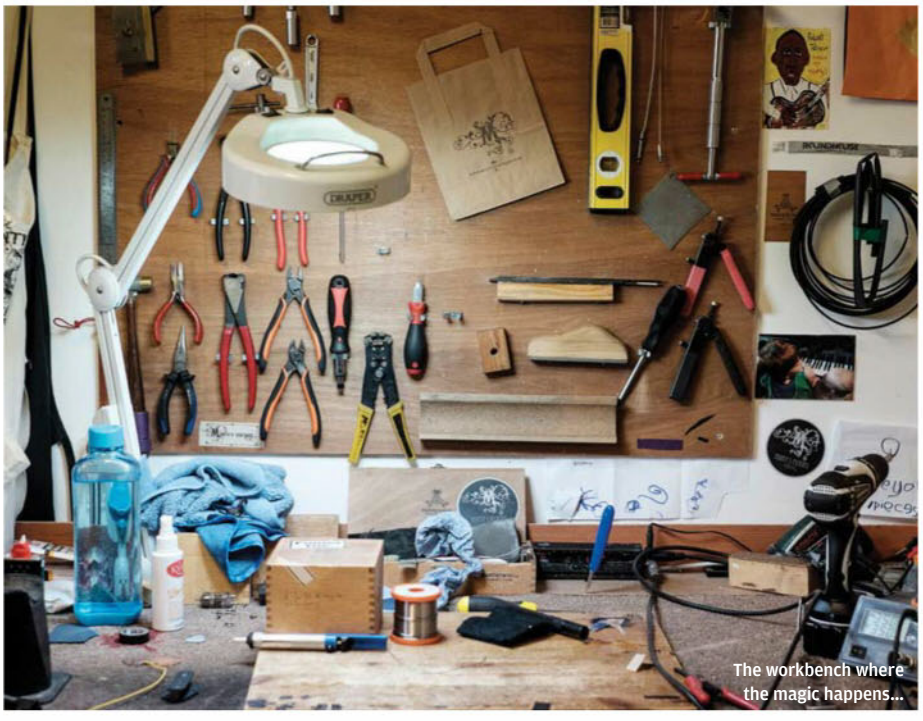
"Then I started modding stuff and building lots of custom guitars," Matt remembers. I did one which was kind of Matt Bellamy-inspired, it was a matte black S-type, which had a [Z.Vex] Fuzz Probe in it with the copper bit on the upper horn; it had boosters, a sustainer, tons of electronics. It was really good fun. There were lots of tricky things like that.

"I started to branch out on my own because Charlie left and I wanted to do my own thing. I wanted to have products as well as just fixing things. So I started with the pickups properly in 2010, moved away up to Peterborough. I was trapped out in a garage behind my house. People thought I was a bit weird at first; one of my neighbours kept bringing me cakes and making sure I was alright! So there were lots of hours in there, swearing, trying to figure stuff out.

"Through the customers that came with me when I left Chandler's, I had a really good bunch of guys that could road test things for me. I play in a covers band and do functions and stuff, so I was always testing things on the road, but it's great to send stuff out that's going to be on tour for six months and make sure it still works when it comes back in – what's it like in in-ears when you can really hear what's going on? Those guys are really picky and it was a huge help, although constructive criticism can sometimes bite!"

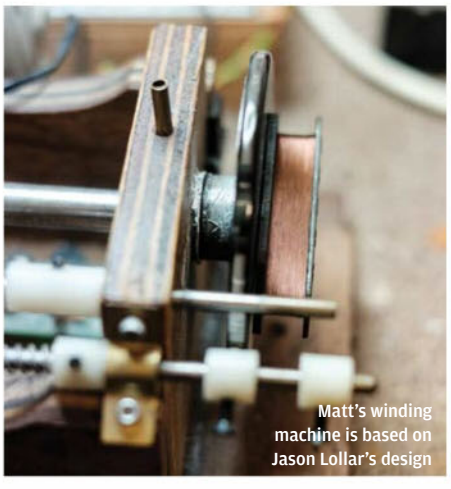
Matt's knowledge of classic pickup designs was enriched by plenty of close encounters with original units: "If a guitar sounded nice I would take stats off everything. Every time I saw [a PAF] I was taking stats off them. Quite a few of my customers have guitars with them in, so I was really fortunate to mess around with those. PAFs are all different. You find ones that suit you and just hope other people like the same sound!"

Matt's winding machine was a self-build based on the design in Jason Lollar's 1998 book *Basic Pickup Winding And Complete Guide To Making Your Own Pickup Winder*, but the road to sonic satisfaction involved a great deal of trial and error: "I've got boxes of shit pickups that I really should take apart and re-use, but I can't bring myself to do it! Once you've made one and it sounds rubbish you >

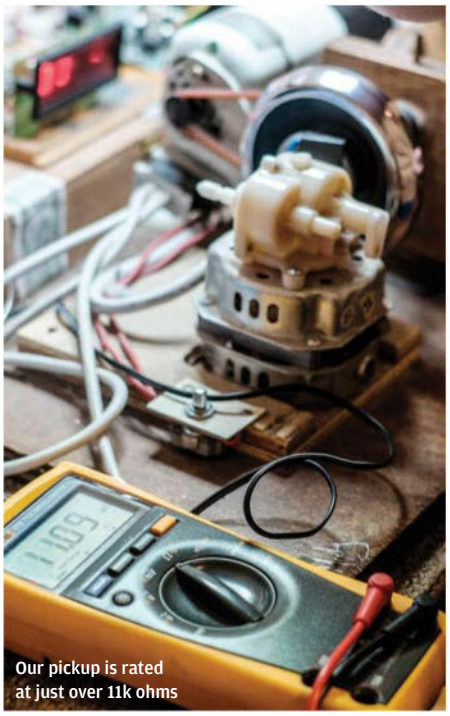


The workbench where the magic happens...

Our Broadcaster-style single coil begins to take shape



Matt's winding machine is based on Jason Lollar's design



Our pickup is rated at just over 11k ohms

Steady hands and patience are required

Matt uses deep fat fryers for wax potting. His pickups are great but his chips aren't up to much

Hand-ageing the freshly-potted bridge pickup

just get rid of it and don't want to see it anymore! You can find things out on forums, but the best thing is to be able to take stats off stuff that's in your hand. Fortunately, I've been able to work with quite a lot of guitars with good things in!"

Amongst the trial and error, there were eureka moments: "My main thing is clarity. Stage volumes are coming down and if you want to be heard at a low volume, there's the right amount of top end. And if it's there, it jumps out. So when I worked out on humbuckers that if you offset [the windings] a certain amount it just opens up the top end... it's quite crazy.

"Humbuckers that are wound exactly the same [on both coils] can be woolly and muddy. They get lost. If you have something that's offset slightly, even by a couple of hundred winds, it's like night and day. Everything just opens up, and it's all sparkly and you just cut through. In the 50s, it wasn't done to counter, it was done to time. I've seen PAFs from 6k-ish all the way up to eight and nearly nine. It's weird because if you offset slightly, depending on magnets and things, it gets really nice, and then it gets woolly again. So there's a sweet spot that you can mess around with, which is quite cool."

His experiments with single coils offered a similarly revelatory moment: "I realised that if you made them taller, you could over-wind them and the mids wouldn't bunch up too much, you could still keep the top end. The coil itself is closer into the magnetic field, so it's seeing more power."

Returning to the subject of humbuckers and clarity, we wonder if it's possible to retain that elusive high-end sparkle and still resist unwanted microphonic squeal. "I'm doing some experiments with Adrian at Vanquish Guitars. He uses my PAFs in lots of his guitars. Lots of his players are quite rocky but they don't want to lose the extra harmonics.

"In the 50s, it wasn't done to counter, it was done to time. I've seen PAFs from 6k-ish up to nearly nine"

"There's one trick you can do where you put some tape over the top, then some PVA glue, just a couple of dabs, and that will buffer the cover, and that'll stop that ringing around, but then if you get up to a certain level it'll still start squealing. So we've tried doing the same thing with wax, so you put wax in the top of the cover, put it in and heat it up. At the moment, we've got it waxed at the top >

The test guitar awaits our finished pickup...

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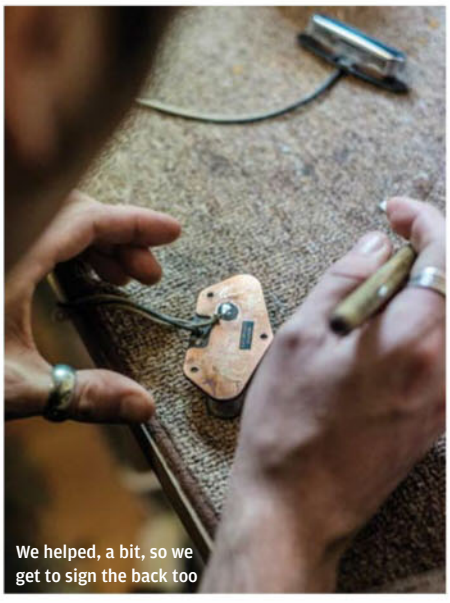
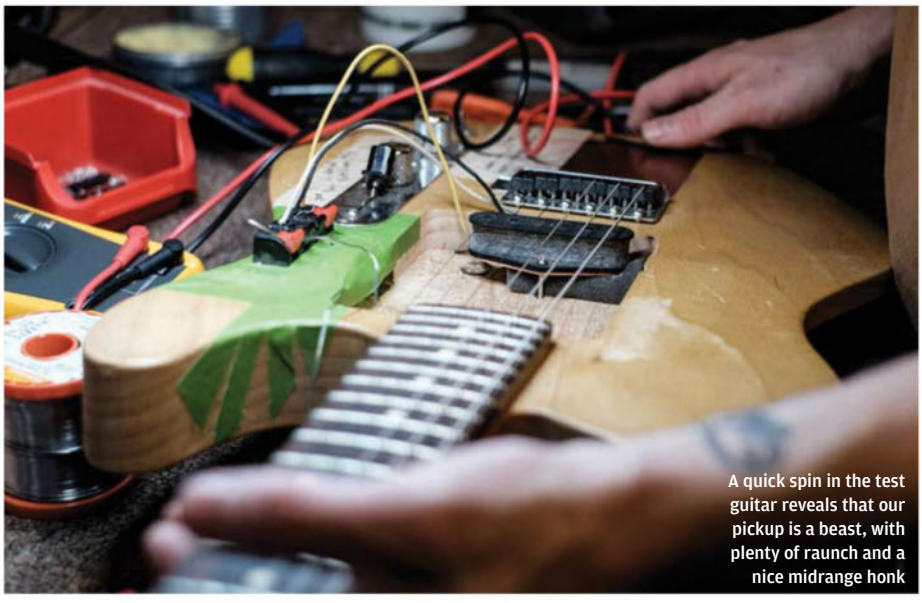


We helped, a bit, so we get to sign the back too



A quick spin in the test guitar reveals that our pickup is a beast, with plenty of raunch and a nice midrange honk

and also the base plate, that's got a really thin layer, and it seems to keep all of the other bits solid. And you still have the unpotted coils, so that's the best of both at the minute, I'm finding."

"I've been trying to work on a '62 Strat set, which I've got 95 per cent right. It's just finding that last bit"

We wonder if Matt has hit upon an optimal way to set his pickups: "It depends on the guitar," he asserts. "There's no rule really. With single coils, it's easier – always start with the neck pickup and raise it up until you get those wolf tones. Then just drop it a little bit. So that's your maximum, you can drop it down from there and it'll become a little more scooped, then you balance the other pickups up.

"With humbuckers and P-90s, because the magnetic field is not so strong at the top, you can have them really, really close, but some people will like that tone and others will like it when they are further away. Especially with PAFs, they sound completely different higher and lower. It's about tweaking, and the other gear that you are using... annoyingly, there is no rule!"

Clutching our freshly wound Broadcaster-spec pickup, to which we added a couple of thousand somewhat scattered winds then pragmatically let the expert finish properly, we ask Matt what's next for Monty's Guitars: "I'm working on some Filter'Tron-style pickups," he reveals. "I did some for Steve Stern over at the Gretsch Custom Shop, for Nalle Colt, and they turned out really well."

The Vintage Trouble guitarist uses Monty's PAFs in both of his main Les Pauls and wanted the same tone for his Custom Shop Gretsch: "Nalle wanted the PAF in the Filter'Tron housing, and we tried a few different styles out to find what worked. But I want to make a real repro of an original and do some different types.

"The thing is with Filter'Trons, inside the bobbins are actually a lot smaller than what you could fit in there, so there's actually quite a lot of scope for modding them. So that's quite exciting. Reproduction stuff is where the business is going, and I enjoy getting it right. I've been trying to work on a '62 Strat set, which I've got 95 per cent right, I think. It's just finding that last bit! I got frustrated with it, so I've left them alone and I'll go back to it. The PAFs took me 18 months, it's a slow process to get it right..."

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Tony Bacon is an author and journalist who writes about musical instruments, musicians and music. His books include *The Ultimate Guitar Book*, *History Of The American Guitar* and *Sunburst*, and his latest is *The SG Guitar Book* (Backbeat), which tells the story of a great Gibson guitar design

TIDINESS IS NEXT TO GODLINESS

In his first column for *G&B*, **TONY BACON** considers two of music's 'tidy' geniuses – Jimi Hendrix and George Martin

Can new ever be old? How can faux ageing on a brand-new guitar match the real-life grime and patina of a well-used vintage instrument? And is the whole vintage idea just some ruse dreamed up by partisan dealers? These are the sort of questions I ask myself all the time, because I write and publish books about old guitars, new guitars, and everything in between. In this new monthly column, I'll be taking a regular squint at guitars and guitarists from some new angles.

Here's a thing: Jimi Hendrix was tidy. I do, of course, mean 'tidy' in the Welsh slang sense: he was, shall we say, pretty good. But also, and more interestingly, I mean he was a tidy-minded individual. I know this because his girlfriend says so, and girlfriends know about this sort of thing. Kathy Etchingham has been in the news again recently because one of Jimi's London residences has been time-machined back to a 1968 vibe, just as Jimi and Kathy decorated it and (briefly) lived in it together. Now the flat is open for us to have a look around. The media got excited about the fact that Hendrix and Handel (you know, the classical bloke) lived very close to one another – separated by a few hundred years and a different attitude to tube amplification, but Kathy let slip that Jimi was a tidy person. She put it down to his stint in the US Army. He made his bed with hospital corners, she reported.

Tidiness can blur into perfectionism, and Jimi's recorded work is full of that

I don't know about you, but it's sometimes the surprising little details that can make you reconsider someone, and in this case reconsider their outlook and their playing. Tidiness can often blur into perfectionism, and Jimi's recorded work is full of that. That's why I usually find documentaries about the man tedious. Film-makers use the available performance footage to represent him – but that wasn't the half of it. Jimi's great and often impeccable work was done in the studio, the place where a tidy attitude came into its own. And that's the hardest thing to show in a film.

Look at his guitars. Now I think about it, his Strats were pretty orderly. One of the bits of footage you always see in those documentaries is the Monterey Pop performance, the one where he burns a Strat. Look closer. At that famous gig, he played eight songs on his favoured black Strat, and then he changed to a knockabout guitar that once had a red body. In readiness for the fiery sacrifice, he'd methodically painted the body white and decorated it with vines, flowers and hearts. The good black one was safely in the hands of a roadie by the time Jimi started the business with the lighter fluid.

It's a pity there isn't footage of him at the flat putting his LPs in order – and yes, among them were a couple of Handel's finest. Also, there was *Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, not only a hugely influential record but one which Jimi included the title song from in his live set a few times. I imagine that, like me, you were saddened to hear about the death earlier this year of George Martin. Once, I asked George an impertinent question. Looking back on it now, decades later, was there anything he'd change about the *Sgt Pepper* album? After a pause, he replied: "I would put a much longer gap between the end of *She's Leaving Home* and *...Kite*. I think it needs more space. It's such a poignant song, and that jars a bit. I thought it was hip at the time. Another thing. Listening on CD, I hear the hiss of the records that were used to dub in the sound effects on *Good Morning*. They were taken off discs. You didn't notice it too much on the vinyl but, my god, you notice it on the CD! Sorry about that, folks." Now that's what I call a tidy-minded producer.

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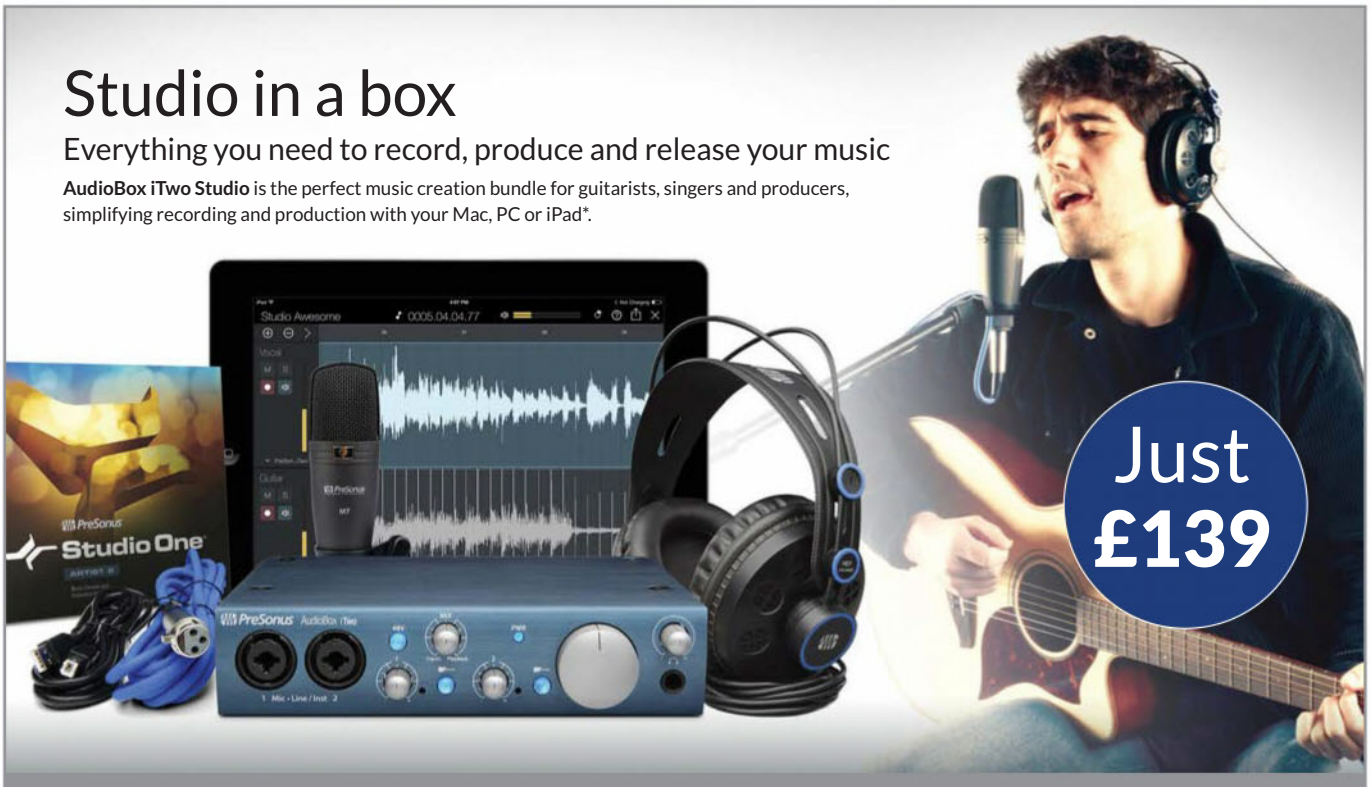

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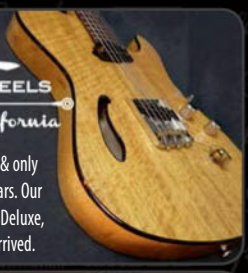

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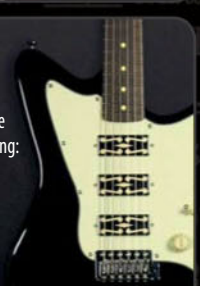

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SUPER STARS

While the Twin and Deluxe grab the headlines, 1950s Fender Supers are among the best-sounding tweed amps of them all. **HUW PRICE** sets up an enviable head to head...

Regular readers will be familiar with the 1956 Fender Super featured here because its restoration was documented in a DIY Workshop in the March issue of *G&B*. It's one of the transitional 5E4-A models Fender made with 6V6s rather than 6L6s and not a model you see every day. The V Front Super (right) loaned to us by Vintage Guitar Boutique is older and rarer still, for reasons we'll discuss later. This isn't going to be an amp 'shootout' as such, but rather a 'compare and contrast' exercise, in order to gain an insight into how the design and tone of Fender Super amps evolved throughout the 1950s.

1950 5B4 Fender Super

This amp was one of the earliest Fender combos, and arguably the most historically significant. Having been released in late 1946 under the name Dual Professional, the jewel light, eyelet circuit board, covered finger-jointed cabinet, on/off switch and two speakers were all firsts for Fender amps. By late 1947, the name was changed to Super and the covering was changed to tweed. The innovations on this amp set the basic template for all of the amps Fender made throughout the 1950s and beyond. Visually, the cabinet seems closer to the later wide and narrow panel tweeds than its TV- >

KEY FEATURES

1950 5B4 Fender V Front Super

- **PRICE** £3,850
- **DESCRIPTION** Two-channel, handwired valve combo, made in USA
- **POWER RATING** 20W
- **VALVES** 3x 6SC7, 2x 6L6, 1x 5U4G
- **CONTROL PANEL** 4x input jacks, volume, volume, tone
- **SPEAKER** 2x Jensen P10R
- **DIMENSIONS** 19.5(h)x9.75/8.75(d) x22.5(w) inches
- **WEIGHT** 15.6kg
- **CONTACT** Vintage Guitar Boutique 0207 729 9186 **www.vintageguitarboutique.com**

Above **The V Front with the back cover removed. It's packing a pair of JJ 6L6 power valves, and all the capacitors have been replaced with modern equivalents**
Opposite page, top **On these early amps, Fender mounted the output transformer on the speaker chassis. Not all of them survived, but this one has**
Middle left **The tube chart is in great condition and suggests this might be one of the first 500 amps Fender ever made**
Middle right **It's always nice to find an original masking tape label with the signature of the person who assembled the amp. This one was made by Lily**
Bottom left **The early amps had these metal plates with Fender's block letter logo**
Bottom right **The metal centre strip is bolted to the chassis and the speaker baffles are bolted to the metal strip**

fronted contemporaries. The Super's distinguishing feature is an angled front with a chrome-plated metal centre strip – it's easy enough to see why these models became known as V Fronts. Fender outsourced the cabinets, and they were more complex than the ones the company subsequently built in-house.

V Fronts are fairly rare – partly because Fender didn't make many of them and partly because Billy Gibbons seems to buy up all the good ones! He famously used a V Front while recording *Antenna*. The V Front Super lasted from '47 until '52, and the three model designations associated with this design are the 5A4, 5B4 and 5C4. The 5A4 had 6SJ7 preamp tubes and three inputs rather than four, and Fender started using 12AY7 tubes in the 5C4.

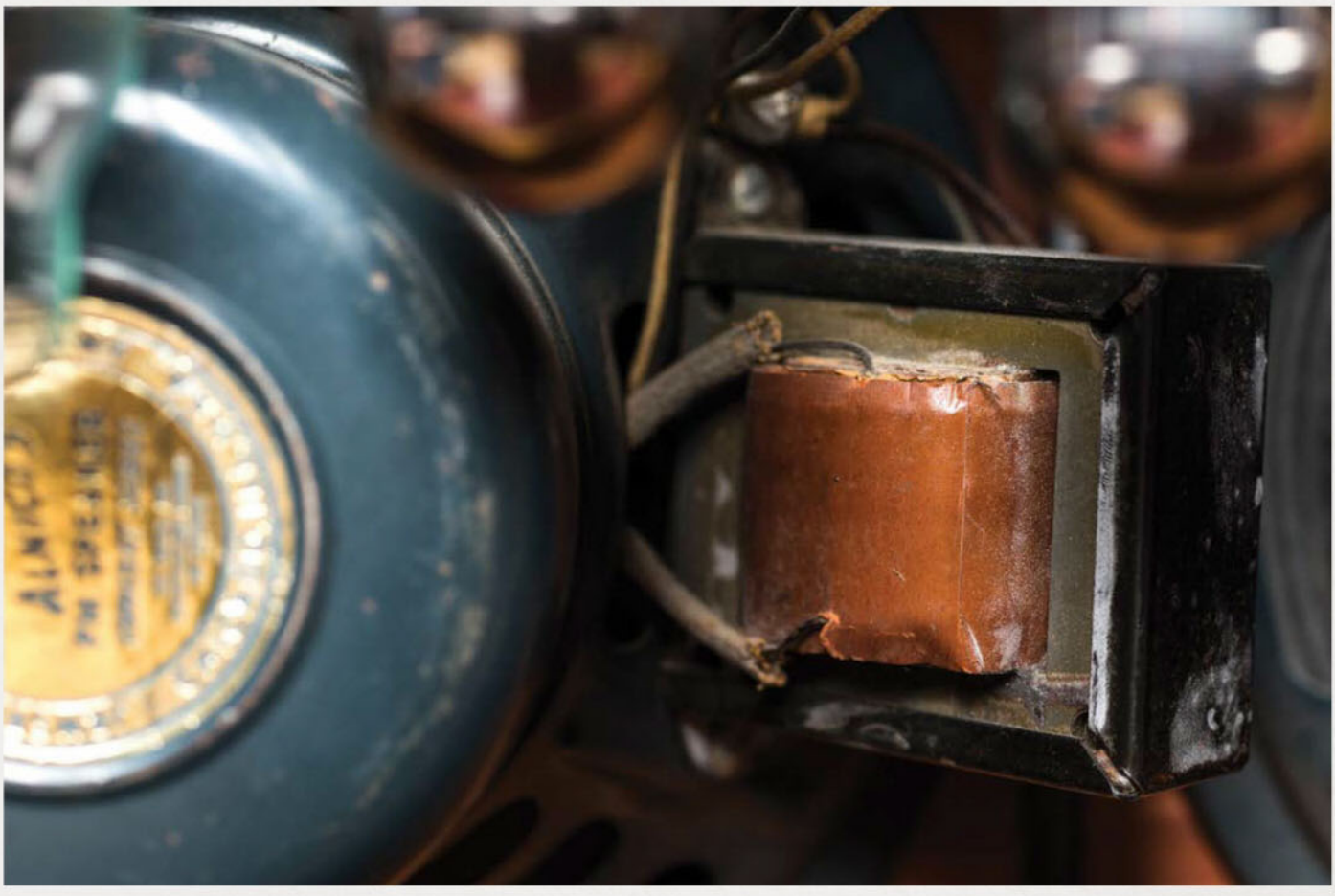
V Fronts are fairly rare – partly because Billy Gibbons seems to buy up all the good ones!

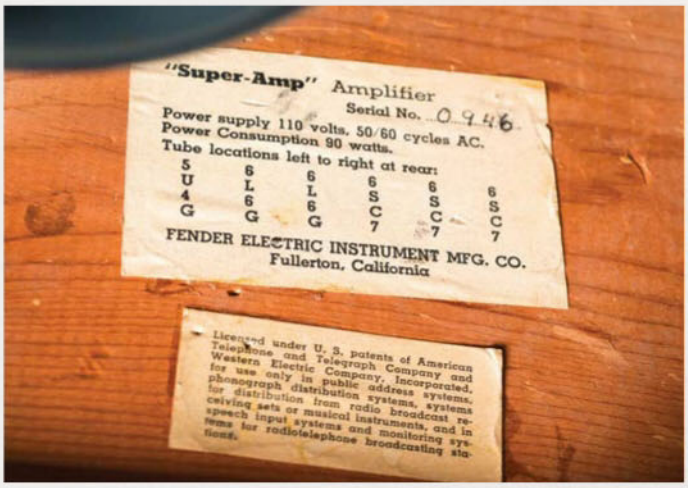
The Jensen P10R speaker codes in this cabinet both read 220951, which means they could date to 1949 or 1959. The tiny font used for the manufacturer/date code and the early-style labels here seem to indicate the former. The 5E4-A also has two Jensen P10Rs, and all four have been re-coned.

Based on its 6SC7 tubes, the four inputs, the serial number and the speaker codes, it seems most likely that this is a 5B4 that was manufactured in 1950. The pot codes read the 11th week of 1950, which probably narrows the window to some time between late March and the middle of that year. The V Front has undergone some electrical restoration work, because this has been a working amp for its current owner. If originality is your overriding concern, you should be aware that an earthed mains cable has been installed, along with three Sprague Atom filter capacitors in the power supply – sensible modifications that will keep you safe and the amp reliable, and vice versa.

In fact, the electrolytics have all been replaced – along with the capacitors in the signal path. ERO/Vishay film caps are used in the preamp stage, with Sprague Orange Drops everywhere else. Although the work has been done adequately, I wouldn't necessarily describe it as an aesthetically sympathetic restoration. Even so, these are quality modern components that sound good and can be relied upon to keep an amp running for years. The high-power carbon composite resistors all appear to be original, and the original 250R cathode bias resistor is still in situ.

The 6SC7s are old USA-made Tung-Sols, and they are teamed up with a pair of modern JJ 6L6s and a Winged C 5U4G rectifier. Fenders of this era had their output transformers mounted directly onto the speaker chassis, and this one appears to be original with a code that looks like 1848. However, the power transformer has been replaced, so I decided to compare the voltages in this amp with readings >




"Super-Amp" Amplifier
Serial No. 0946
Power supply 110 volts, 50/60 cycles AC.
Power Consumption 90 watts.
Tube locations left to right at rear:
5 6 6 6 6
U L L S S 6
4 6 6 S C S
G G G C 7 C
7 7
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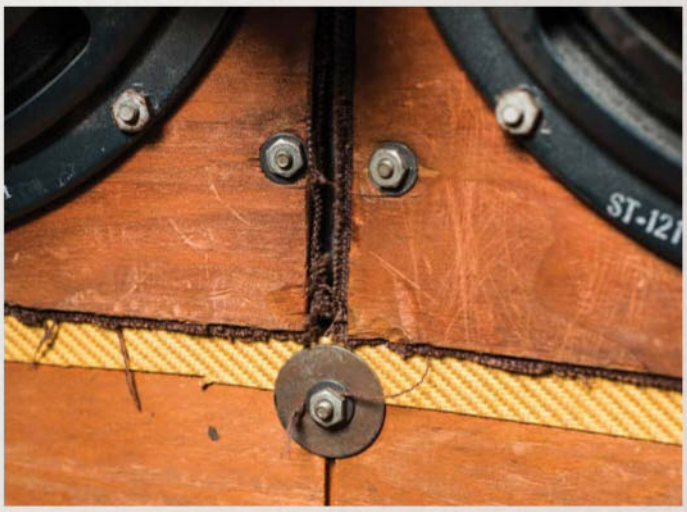
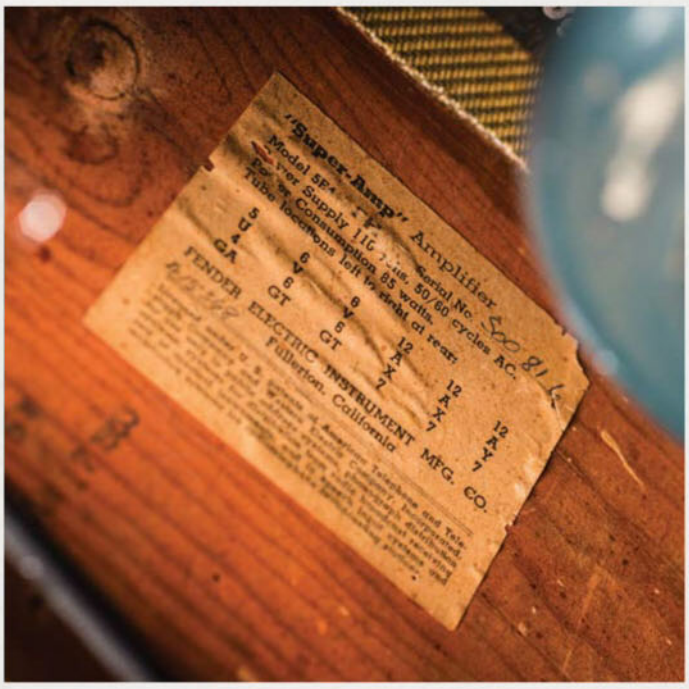

ST-12


"Super-Amp" Amplifier
Model 5F4
Power Supply 116
Power Consumption 85 watts
Tube Complement
5 GA
6 V6 GT
6 V6 GT
12 AX7
12 AX7
12 AX7
FENDER ELECTRIC INSTRUMENT MFG. CO.
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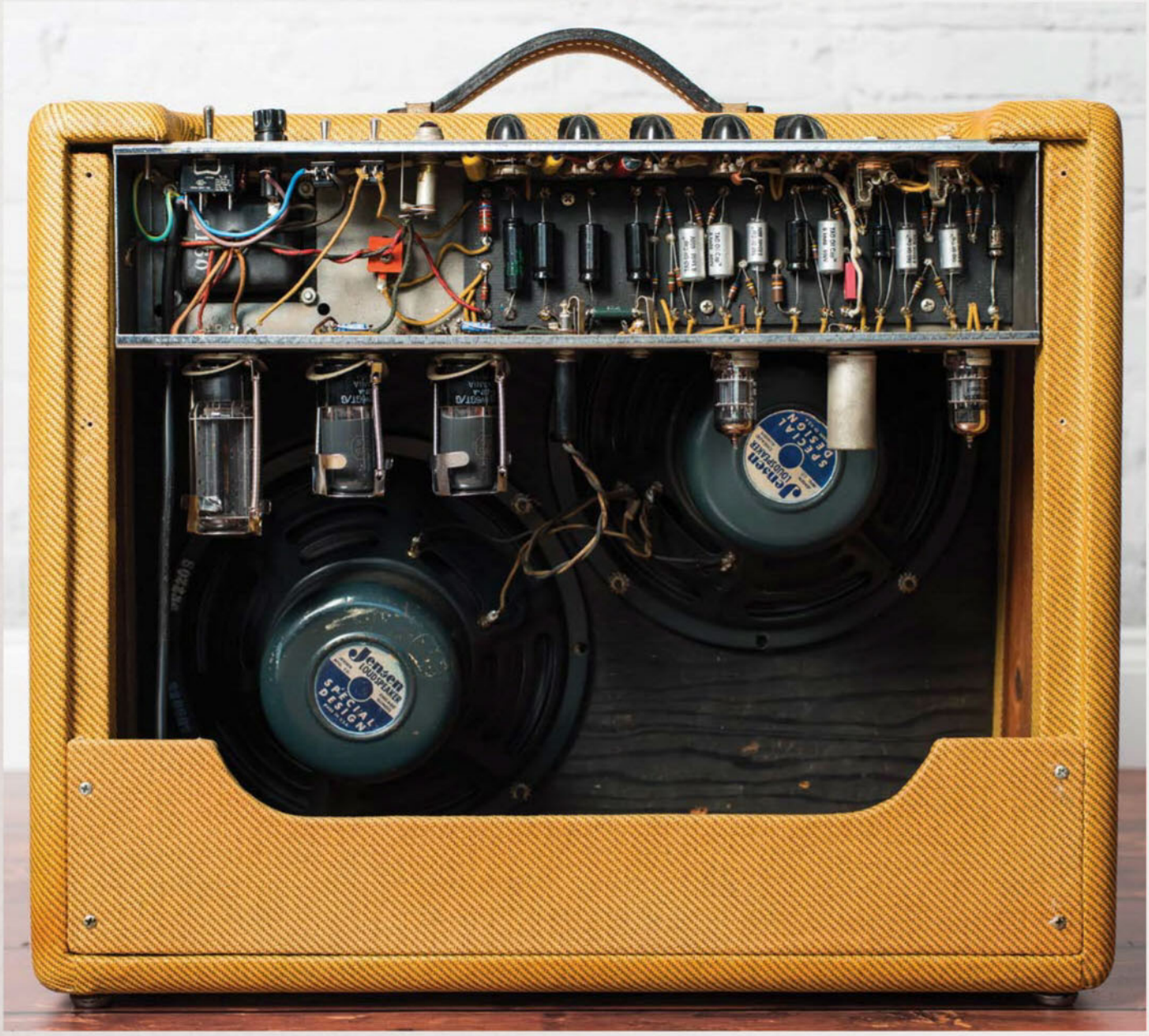

Jensen
SPECIAL DESIGN
Jensen
SPECIAL DESIGN

that have been taken from an original example. All the preamp valve plates were about 10 volts above the specified 70, but that's well within Fender's plus or minus 20 per cent margin. The cathode biased 6L6s were getting 420 volts on the plates, which is a fair bit higher than the other amp's 300, but more or less in line with the plate voltages Fender was using in the 5F4 Super by the end of the 50s. Fender's early tweed schematics were published without voltage specs, so it's down to techs to tune these amps by ear and ensure the valves are operating within recommended parameters.

The cabinet still sports its original low-contrast tweed, and it's in very good cosmetic condition considering its age. Even the brown linen speaker cloth remains taught and unblemished. The handle is almost certainly a replacement, but you've got to love the little name badge with the blocky early Fender logo. The spaghetti logo makes an early appearance on the silk-screened control panel.

1956 5E4-A Fender Super

Having recently featured this amp in *G&B*, I'm not going to go into too much detail with the description. Suffice to say it dates from August 1956 and it still has its original speakers, choke and transformers. It's had a re-tweed and, like the V Front, has undergone a thorough electronic restoration.

It's had a re-tweed and, like the V Front, has undergone a thorough electronic restoration

It is worth noting how much changed in the six years between these amps; the power supply has been beefed up with a choke and a standby switch, and it left the factory with a ground switch. The preamp stage has 'modern miniature' valves, with a 12AY7 at the front, followed by two 12AX7s. Fixed bias is used for the 6V6 power valves.

The simple treble roll-off tone control has evolved into a Baxandall-style tone stack with separate treble and bass controls. There is even a presence control, which demonstrates that Fender had started using negative feedback. Both amps are rated at around 22 watts, but within a few months Fender would revert to 6L6 power valves with a beefier output transformer for the 35-watt 5F4.

In use

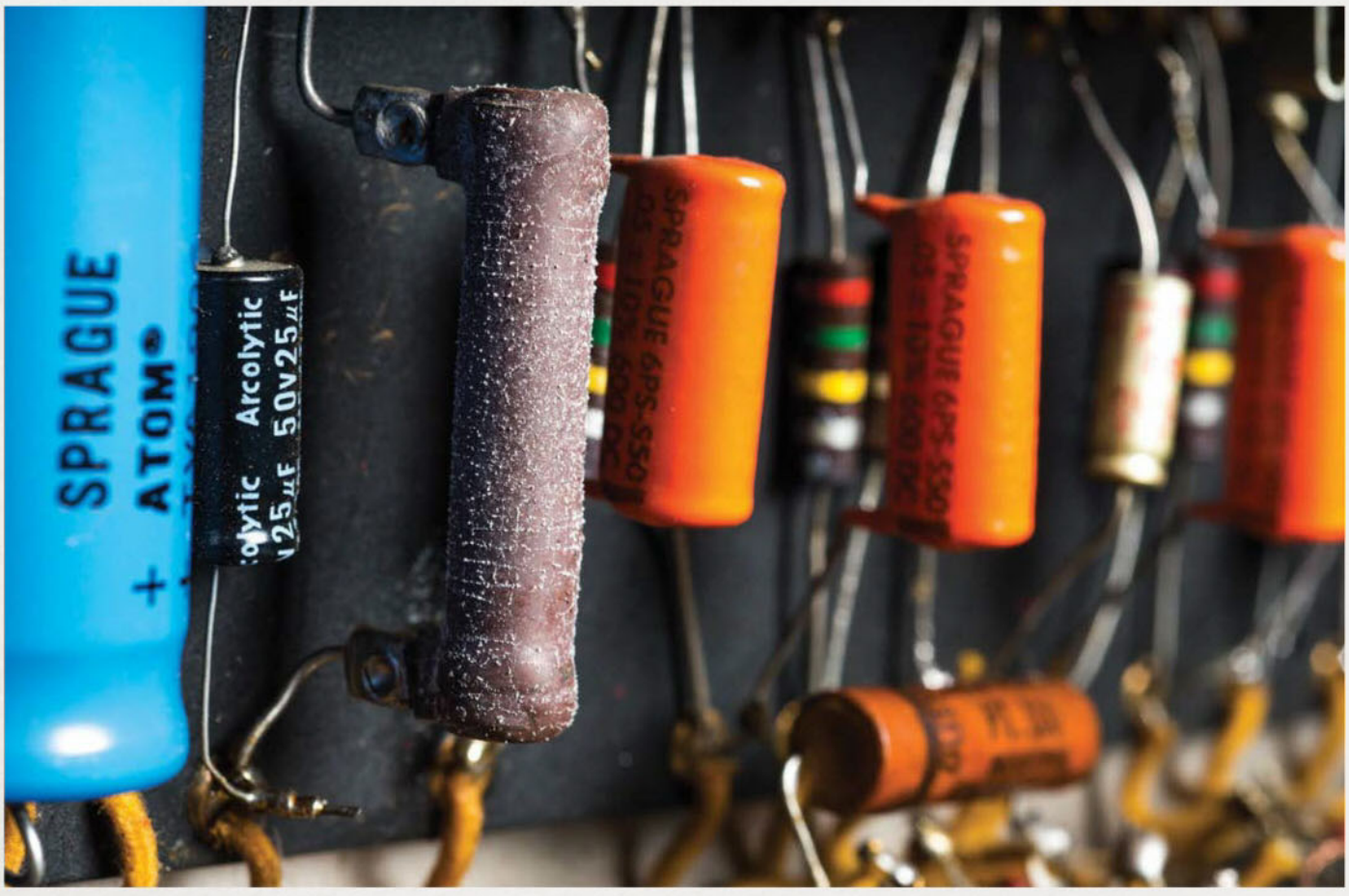
When I handed Ed back his '56 Super, I did so feeling it was the best 50s tweed I had ever played. I was slightly apprehensive that the V Front Super would fail to match up, so I'm pleased to report that it was misplaced concern. It's no wonder that BFG loves them. I have used a '51 Fender Deluxe as my main amp for over a decade. In stock form, it had wonderful warm mids but the treble was too muted and the inefficient Jensen sounded a tad flabby and lifeless. Installing a Celestion Blue and performing a few other minor tweaks cured all ills. >

KEY FEATURES

1956 5E4-A Fender Super

- **PRICE** N/A
- **DESCRIPTION** Two-channel, handwired valve combo, made in the USA
- **POWER RATING** 22W
- **VALVES** 1x 12AY7, 2x 12AX7, 2x 6L6, 1x 5U4G
- **CONTROL PANEL** 4x input jacks, volume, volume, treble, bass, presence
- **REAR PANEL** 2x speaker jacks
- **SPEAKER** 2x Jensen P10R
- **DIMENSIONS** 18(h)x9.24(d)x22(w) inches
- **WEIGHT** 15kg

Opposite page, top left **The valve line-up of two 12AX7s and a pair of 6V6s is very unusual for tweed Supers, and makes this quite a rare amp**
Top right **The speaker date codes are consistent with a manufacturing date of 1956**
Bottom **Offsetting the speakers allowed Fender to make the later Super cabinet a bit narrower**
This page **By 1956 Fender was using a script logo but the location hadn't changed**



Above **The V Front has Sprague Atom filter capacitors and Orange Drop signal capacitors, but the resistors are original**

I had half expected more of the same from the Super, but this amp is a very different beast. There's no shortage of treble, and turning up the tone doesn't increase gain as much as it does on the Deluxe. The Super is much louder and it spreads the sound around the room – walk across the front of the amp as you're playing and there's sonic consistency rather than a discernable sweet spot.

What it does have in common with the Deluxe is a deliciously full, rounded and chewy midrange. It's something I also noticed on the Elektra 185 amp we recently featured, and tweed aficionados generally consider this as a sonic characteristic of the octal preamp valves.

It's umistakably a 50s tweed. However, it's loud, punchy, bright and entirely devoid of boxiness

I would agree, but I long ago abandoned the 6SL7s in my Deluxe for Groove Tube converters to run more modern-style preamp valves. It's not something I would have chosen to do, but I had found it impossible to source reliable and non-microphonic octal valves.

The 6SC7s in this Super are slightly microphonic, so you do get some odd high-frequency ringing, as well as occasional low-frequency wolf tones. Fortunately, both diminish after a short while. In fact, the improvement in tone once this amp has warmed up is very noticeable indeed.

The plus side of changing my Deluxe to 'modern' preamp valves was clearer tone with extra gain. If this V Front were mine, I'd keep the 6SC7s, because there's no shortage of gain or clarity. That's the most surprising thing about this combo – it doesn't sound like an amp designed during the 1940s. To be clear about this, it's unmistakably a 50s tweed tone. However, it's loud, punchy, bright and entirely devoid of boxiness, with the bass end staying solid and sag-free, even with the volume maxed out.

At low volumes, you need to turn up the tone, but you're rewarded with the most delicate trebles and a sound that's vibrant but devoid of spikiness. Nothing seems to jump out at you, so it's easy to play, yet doesn't sound compressed. Country, jazz, rockabilly – you name it, this amp does it.

Keeping the tone high and turning up the volume gradually introduces a glorious harmonically loaded overdrive. Play a low E or hit a powerchord with P-90s or a Tele bridge pickup and this amp has the tonal complexity of a piano. Aggressive blues riffs and revved-up rock 'n' roll abound, and these valves respond really well to pickups that can provide some extra push. I thought I'd shoot for some Gibbons tones with my Lester, and stumbled on a magical setting with the volume up full and the tone rolled back to around a third. The V Front dished up the sleaziest of blues rock tones. Just grinding away on the low strings or flicking to the neck and soloing up-top is a sheer joy. This is altogether more earthy and primal than Beano and classic blues rock tone.

So let's move on to the 5E4-A. Again, this amp >

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Above left **Compare this old-style Jensen speaker label with the late-50s label on the '56 speakers**
Above right **The power valves may be modern, but the V Front's 5U4G is a vintage rectifier tube**

sounds as if it's way ahead of its time. The dynamic response and basic character of the overdrive are very tweedy, but the scooped mids coupled with the vastly extended high- and low-frequency response provide an obvious roadmap to the brownface, blackface and Marshall amps that would hit the scene a few years later. It's the louder of the two by some distance, but that means there's a lot more clean headroom. With a Tele, you can chicken pick and get a Bakersfield twang. Strats have that glassy shimmer of Hendrix and SRV in their mellower moments, and you can dial in woody but articulate jazz tones with humbuckers and P-90s.

Turning up the treble control massively increases the gain. In fact, the treble has to be reasonably high to get the 5E4-A overdriving, so the presence hardly gets turned up at all. The overdrive also sounds different because it's heavier, wilder and more ferocious than anything the V Front can produce.

With a Tele, you can get the bite of Springsteen on *Darkness On The Edge Of Town*. Plug in a Les Paul and it's supercharged blues and heavy rock, but without the ear-piecing shrillness of some later amps. The treble floats airily over the top and the bass sounds vast.

Much as I adore the V Front, I would have to concede that the 5E4-A is the more versatile and practical gigging amp. The V Front has a very distinctive tone that would be wonderful in the right rootsy, retro context, but you'd be hard pressed to get all the tones you might need playing in a covers band. There are no such concerns with the 5E4-A because you can cover every base with this one.

Common sonic attributes include a beautifully joined up and easy-going dynamic response, an uncanny ability to go from glorious overdrive to sparkling cleans with a mere tweak of a volume control, shimmering and ever-shifting upper harmonics and an unerring ability to make held notes bloom.

Much as I adore the V Front, I have to concede that the 5E4-A is the more versatile gigging amp

It's enough to make you wonder why we ever needed compressor, overdrive and chorus pedals – although both amps perform well as pedal platforms too.

On balance, I suspect this comparison has revealed more about the way tweed Supers, rather than 50s Fender tweeds in general, evolved. The V Front Super is a wondrous tone monster that isn't necessarily representative of early tweed tone. In fact, with the high HT voltages running in the power amp, it might not be representative of the V Front sound at all.

Ultimately, I couldn't choose between these tweed Supers. Whenever I began to favour one, I'd plug into the other and change my mind. I guess the solution is simple – I need to win the lottery and buy both, along with an ABY box.

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STEVENSON ROCKS IT

With bands such as The Cult and The Alarm on his CV, James Stevenson has built up quite a collection of fine guitars. **LARS MULLEN** takes a look at some of the highlights

In 1977, James Stevenson joined punk band Chelsea, launching a career that's seen him play with, amongst others, Generation X, Kim Wilde, Gene Loves Jezebel, Glen Matlock, The International Swingers, The Cult, The Alarm and Holy Holy... maintaining one constant – he's been a Gibson player throughout.

"I've always played Gibson guitars," says Stevenson, "especially Les Paul Customs. My '74 Gibson has become my number one live guitar. It's yellowed over the years, like they all do. There's a headstock repair, where The Cult's drummer, John Tempesta, tripped over the strap when we were going back for an encore in Pomona, California.

"I saw it go down and thought 'it'll be out of tune now', but when I picked it up I could see this massive crack. John was so upset about it, but Billy Duffy's guitar tech, Tom Webber, did an amazing repair job that night and I used it the next day – and it's been fine ever since.

"I love Les Pauls with mahogany necks, before they went to maple around '75. I have a few. I have three nice 20th Anniversary models finished in Wine Red, Natural and Tobacco Burst. I think the maple caps look so nice through coloured finishes. A lot of people think they were available only in black or white.

"The cap on another of my Customs is a little unusual, as it's solid Brazilian rosewood. I believe only 52 were shipped between '74 and '75. It took me a while to find this one, it's a killer guitar and not as heavy as you would think.

"I sold a few guitars to get a 1960 Les Paul Standard. As soon as I tried it, I couldn't let it slip through"

"I sold quite a few guitars from my collection to get a 1960 Cherry Sunburst Les Paul. As soon as I tried it, I knew I couldn't let this one slip through.

"It was a lot of money, but worth every penny. I used it on a couple of songs, called *Suzi's Problem* and *Come On People* on my new solo album, called *Everything's Getting Closer To Being Over*. I recorded it at Barrie Barlow's studio – he's the drummer with Jethro Tull, and he's also on a few tracks on the album. It was produced by Peter Walsh, who handles Scott Walker and Peter Gabriel. This album is a little more laid back than you'd expect from a guitarist in The Alarm and a guy who grew up listening to glam rock, but I loved all those Tamla >

Above, left to right **Stevenson's Les Paul Junior, 1954 Les Paul Goldtop with P-90s and Les Paul Custom**
Opposite page, top left **Stevenson with his main live guitar – a 1974 Les Paul Custom, with headstock crack**
Middle right **Martin D-35 12 with Brazilian rosewood back and sides**
Bottom left **Les Paul Custom with Brazilian rosewood cap**
Bottom centre **1969 Tele with Bigsby; Shoreline Gold Tele with maple-capped fingerboard**
Bottom right **1960 Gibson Les Paul**

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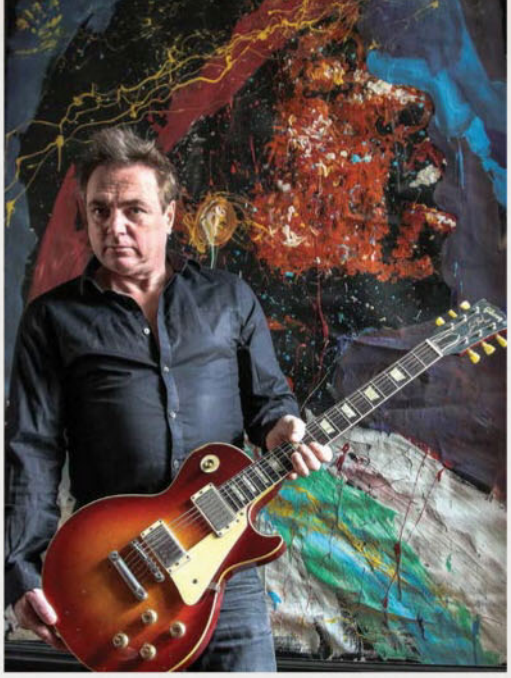

Motown records as well, which have rubbed off on me a lot on this record. But you can really hear how sweet the '60 Les Paul is on these tracks, without effects, just straight into my '66 Marshall Super Tremolo amp, which I've had for over 40 years.

"I don't care what anyone says to me, older vintage guitars sound better, it's just a fact. It has to be age-related, where the woods are so dried out, all the late-50s and 60s Gibson guitars I've tried have been incredible."

"I don't care what anyone says to me, older vintage guitars sound better, it's just a fact"

As James continues to show us around his collection, he takes out a trio of P-90-loaded beauties. He continues: "I just think P-90s from the 50s have a killer sound. What can I say about a Les Paul Junior like mine that hasn't been said before? They made so many of these guitars, which were just produced for students at an affordable price. But Gibson still used all the right components, wood and hardware, it's just a very simple concept that works.

My one dates from '56. I do miss the toggle switch, though. I like to back right off one of the pickups on the Customs, so it acts like a mute switch in between numbers.

"I saw the '54 P-90-loaded Goldtop online in a shop in Vienna, not long after I sold the same model from my collection. I suddenly realised how fast the prices were rising, so I snapped the beauty up before they got too expensive. I used it on Glen Matlock's *Born Running* album, it felt like it was destined for the tracks – it's a killer guitar.

"The black Custom I have dates from '57 and has had a few minor makeovers – the neck, for example, has been refinished beautifully, and what a player it is. I've toured with American guitarist Willie Nile a few times in the UK, and this guitar just works so well with his material. It's all-mahogany, but really light on the shoulder, only weighing about 8lbs. People think the heavy ones have more sustain, which >

Top left **A trio of 1960s Fender Electric XII models**
Top right **Stevenson with his 1960 Gibson Les Paul Standard**
Above, left to right **1966 Epiphone Casino; 1960 Gibson ES-330; Gibson ES-335 12-string**

Top **Gibson Hummingbird (centre) and two Epiphone Frontiers**
Above left **Fretboard detail on 20th Anniversary Gibson Les Paul Custom**
Above right, left to right **Trio of 20th Anniversary Gibson Les Pauls with mahogany necks**

is a complete myth – the lighter they are, the more resonant they are.

"I've learnt a lot about guitars over the years, especially from the great guitars that pass through Angel Music in Denmark Street, of which I'm a partner. I'm hardly ever there, but my weakness is when I hear about cool guitars that come in, I want to keep them!"

Even a devoted Gibson player has to have a classic Fender or two in their collection, and Stevenson is no different.

"Well, a Tele just solves so many problems in the studio doesn't it?" he says. "When we were recording Gene Loves Jezebel's album *Heavenly Bodies* in the early 90s, I was trying to get the guitar sound that George Harrison had on *Happiness Is A Warm Gun*, and I realised to get that sound I had to have a Telecaster. I have two at the moment – a black one from '69 with a Bigsby, you can tell this is factory-fitted as the strings anchor through the unit rather than through the body. The other one, with a really nice maple-capped fingerboard, is from '66, with a '62 body, which I had finished in Shoreline Gold by Clive Brown.

"A Tele just solves so many problems in the studio, doesn't it? I have two at the moment – a '69 and a '66"

"Telecasters are one of eight models on my list that I feel you just have to have. Others include a Les Paul, a Strat, a Gibson ES-335 and a ES-330, acoustic 6- and 12-strings and an electric 12-string. I have three 60s Fender 12-strings, which I love, so I can tick them off the list.

"One of my guitars counts as two on the list; it's a Cherry-finished Gibson 335 12-string from '68, which is in *The Gibson 335* book, and I've got a very nice 330 from '60 that's also on the list. I included a '66 Epiphone Casino in this trio of semis, not only for the rare Royal Tan finish, but as it's a little unusual with one P-90 in the middle. It's one of the finest guitars I've used for rhythm work."

Stevenson is far from short of cool acoustics on his list of sonic essentials. "I love the sound of a >

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12-string guitar, full-stop – electric or acoustic – and I can safely say this Martin D-35 12 with a Brazilian rosewood body, built in '69 is the finest acoustic 12 I've ever played.

"Apparently, in '63, Gibson was getting so many orders for Hummingbirds and not for Doves, so it put Hummingbird scratchplates on its stocks of Doves, which had maple bodies, so I've got a maple-bodied Hummingbird from '63 along with a pair of cool Epiphone Frontier acoustics with the cactus-and-rope design scratchplates. The lighter Cherry Burst Frontier, I sold to Andy Bell of Oasis, but I missed it so much I persuaded him to sell it back to me.

"I love a really nice Cherry Burst finish, also seen on my three-quarter size Gibson LG acoustic, which I keep in Nashville tuning. It's perfect for double-tracking with a full-size acoustic in the studio. As you can tell, my collection is basically vintage guitars, but I have to say, there are some modern brands that are producing incredible models. I'm really impressed with the new baritone acoustic by Auden, called the Edgar. The build and performance is superb, and priced very reasonably for a hand-built guitar using quality tonewoods.

"I miss my guitars. I started to get paranoid about security, so they're all kept in a lockup now"

"I have a go-to corner when I need a little icing on the cake in the studio, like the Gibson LG. My British-built Vox Mando is ideal for overdubbing on acoustic guitars, and for uplifting bass tracks I'll reach for the Fender Bass VI from '74 every time, which sounds stunning straight into a Fender Super Reverb.

"But, you know, I miss my guitars. I started to get paranoid about security around the house, so they're all kept in a safe lockup now, where I go when I'm back from a tour or just want to spend time with them, it's like a fun day out for me."

For more information on Jamie Stevenson, visit: facebook.com/jamesonguitars

Top **Auden baritone acoustic; Gibson LG**
Above, left to right **Vox Mando; Gretsch Super Axe; Fender Bass VI**

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Gibson Memphis ES-339 Studio
2015. Finished in Gingerburst. Maple Semi-hollow body. Tradition C profile neck, 12" fingerboard radius. 57' classic humbuckers. Comes with Hard Case.

Gibson 2011 Les Paul Traditional
Finished in Black. Mahogany body with Maple cap. 12" radius 50s style neck profile. 57' classic humbuckers. Excellent condition. Comes with hard Case.

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Gibson ES-135 Circa 1993
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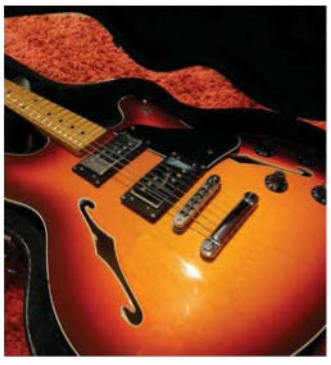

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All about... playing with PAFs

When it comes to PAF tone, myths and hype abound. **HUW PRICE** examines the design and development of this revered pickup from guitar's golden era, and tells us what it's really like to play them...

History

Ted McCarty instigated the design process for Gibson's first noise-free pickup in 1955. Although Seth Lover is widely regarded as the main man, he worked on the project with P-90 designer Walt Fuller. Lover's involvement with Gibson stretched back to the 1940s and, having rejoined the company in 1952, he was responsible for the 'staple P-90', which helped keep the DeArmond-inclined Les Paul on-message.

While Ray Butts' Filter'Tron design was influenced by a hum-cancelling circuit used in Ampex tape machines, Lover was inspired by the hum-cancelling 'choke' (iron-core inductor) used in the power supply of some valve amps to filter out unwanted AC ripple. However, the 'humbucking' principle went back to 1934, when Electro-Voice invented the 'humbucking coil'. If you thought stacked humbucker pickups were a later development, you may be surprised to learn that A.F. Knoblaugh invented that in 1938, for Baldwin electric pianos.

Even so, Lover's adjacent coil arrangement was different enough for Gibson to apply for a US patent in June '55. Having appeared on steel guitars in 1956, the humbucker was fitted to the Les Paul and various archtops from early 1957 and Gibson introduced a decal on the base plate reading 'Patent Applied For' in late-'57: hence the familiar soubriquet. Although a US patent was granted in July of 1959, the 'PAF' decal lasted until late in 1962, when it was replaced by a decal carrying the (incorrect) patent number. Other changes were made around this time and although some early-spec pickups may have ended up with patent-number decals, the PAF era was effectively over.

How humbuckers work

String vibration and electromagnetic interference both generate alternating currents in guitar-pickup coils. Regardless of what your parents and grandparents may think, the former is music and the latter is noise. A vibrating string causes changes in the pickup's magnetic field, which induces an alternating current in the coil. Noise comes about because the pickup's wire coil acts as an antenna. To eliminate noise while retaining the musical signal, Lover utilised two coils that were electronically out of phase. Both coils picked up noise equally, but when the noise currents in the coils were combined, the noise was cancelled out. The really clever part is how Lover ensured the string-induced signal wasn't cancelled out, too.

The polarity of the noise-induced current is solely dependent on the winding direction of the coils. In contrast, the string signal's polarity depends on the polarity of the magnetic field, as well as the direction of the winding.

Both coils had polepieces and Lover placed a single bar magnet between them. It was oriented so one set of polepieces would be north and the other south.

Combining reverse winding with reverse magnetic polarity is akin to having two phase switches activated – which is effectively the same as having no phase switches at all. So the reversed magnetic polarity functioned as a pseudo 'second switch', to put the string signals back in phase while having no effect on the noise cancellation.

Virtually every Gibson-inspired humbucker since 1957 has been made the same way as Lover's design

Virtually every Gibson-inspired humbucker produced since 1957 has been made the same way. So the question has to be, what makes PAFs different to the humbuckers that came later? To answer that, we need to break down the constituent parts.

Magnets

All PAFs had rough sand-cast magnets with alnico grades used randomly. A2 and 5 is commonly reported; some claim A4 was also used, while others dispute whether A3 magnets were ever installed in PAFs. Many modern PAF replicas are made with A4, because it's a consistent and reliable way to replicate the tone of weakened A5.

Like every other maker at that time, Gibson had to use whatever they could get hold of. The early magnets were 2 ½" long and were shortened by ¼" in 1961, when alnico 5 became standard. The shape of the magnetic field changed as a result. A black line was drawn to mark the north side and the ½" width and 1/8" thickness remained constant throughout. The various grades of alnico, coupled with ageing inconsistencies, partly explains why the sound of PAF pickups varies so much. Incidentally, Gibson used the same magnets in P-90s and PAFs. >

A 1957 Les Paul Goldtop with early PAFs – note the lack of decal on the underside (opposite page) and the covers of brushed stainless steel rather than nickel

BUYER'S GUIDE

Virtually every pickup maker in the business has a PAF replica in the product range. Some offer several varieties and others make PAF replicas exclusively. Some are offered pre-aged and the quality of the relicing can be terrifying to behold. Even so, the likelihood is that relatively few pickup makers have even been in the same room as a vintage PAF, let alone played one. Here's a small selection of PAF replicas that are respected by those in the know.

STEPHENS DESIGN PG HD/59 HD
$785 (PAIR)

Based in Seattle, Dave Stephens is a bona-fide PAF authority and it's reflected in the way his PAF replicas are built. I haven't tried them myself, but friend and colleague Dave Hunter put it this way: "Let's just say... they deliver to the player wanting to go all out for real deal '59 tone, and leave it at that."

SHED PAF DADDIES £220 (PAIR)

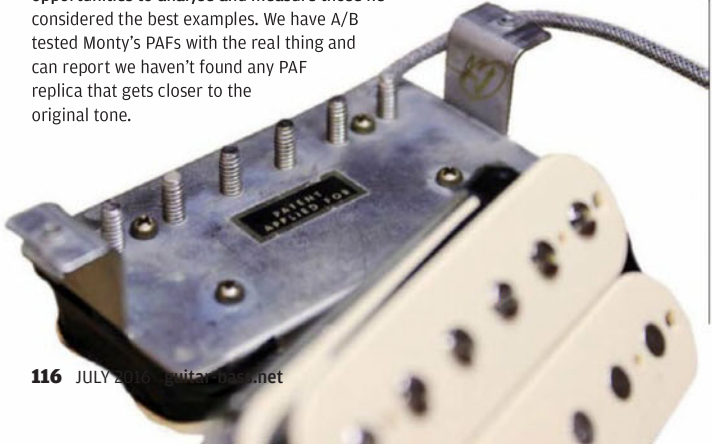
Spencer Mumford uses vintage-correct components and applies his outstanding relicing skills to create a PAF replica that looks indistinguishable from a real 55-year-old gig warrior.

MOJO PICKUPS "VINTAGE" PAFS LOW OUTPUT £190 (PAIR)

Voiced to capture the early-PAF sound with a brighter and slightly lower output than Mojo's standard PAF set. Vintage-spec parts include butyrate bobbins, rough-cast magnets, two-stranded braid hookup wire and de-guassed alnico magnets. Available relic'd.

MONTY'S PAF £216.99 (PAIR)

Matt Gleeson has had his hands on countless genuine PAFs as a guitar restorer and repairer and he took his opportunities to analyse and measure those he considered the best examples. We have A/B tested Monty's PAFs with the real thing and can report we haven't found any PAF replica that gets closer to the original tone.



Coils

Gibson used purple 42 AWG plain enamel wire wound with non-automated machines. Due to the distance between the bobbin and the machine, the wire would jink about as the coil was being wound, which created a pseudo 'scattered' pattern. Operators would switch the machine off when bobbins looked full, which resulted in coil shape and size inconsistencies, as well as varied DC resistance. Roughly speaking, PAF coils in series ohm out between 7.5k and 9k, which is more or less in line with P-90s of the era.

Crucially, the coils were not evenly matched, and this 'offset' is considered a major factor in the characteristic clarity and definition of a good PAF. However, achieving the right degree of mismatch is crucial, as Matt Gleeson of Monty's Guitars explains. "If there's too much offset... they're thinner sounding. Then, if the coils are identical, all that clarity is lost. Maximum hum cancelling comes with maximum treble reduction."

Winding tension is also an important variable. Since PAF coils weren't wax potted, the coils had to be tight enough not to squeal. However, if they're too tight, you can lose the open sound quality and touch response. Finally, the coils were wound with #4 flatback insulation tape for protection.

Covers and plates

Seth Lover had initially wanted a closed cover, because he regarded adjustable polepieces as unnecessary. However, the Gibson high-ups insisted they were a key selling point. The very earliest Gibson humbuckers had brushed stainless-steel covers. This soon changed to nickel silver, with gold plating a later option. Most builders agree the cover should be as thin as possible to maintain an open sound and minimise treble roll off. In the mistaken belief they would get more volume, players often removed PAF covers.

In order to avoid disruption to the magnetic field, Lover specified a nickel-silver bottom plate. He chose brass bobbin retainer screws for the same reason, but Gibson later used steel screws.

Sound

While working as a tape op in the early 90s, I had a sneaky go on a famous '57 Goldtop, but at the time, I didn't know enough to appreciate it. Only recently have I had the opportunity to play a handful of PAF-equipped Gibsons and I hadn't anticipated how versatile, dynamically responsive and expressive PAFs would sound. They were more like Fender pickups on steroids than fat, hot-wound, balls-to-the-wall rock pickups.

PAFs are supposed to vary, but all the ones I played had a sweet and airy brightness. When I turned down volume controls, there was no loss of clarity or definition whatsoever. The bridge tone was transformed from a raucous metallic bite into something approaching country quack. Similarly, the neck pickups ranged from a flutey and vocal blues tone to a semi-acoustic woody jazziness. I also discovered you could jangle on a Lester.

They also sustain in the most remarkable way, even at fairly low volume and gain levels. As you hold a note, harmonic overtones drift in and out constantly, so the sound is never static. If you add finger vibrato, notes finally cross-fade into friction noise that's surprisingly loud and something I've heard on many vintage Gibson recordings.

The most surprising experience was comparing two Goldtops from '54 and '57. I found the PAFs brighter, subtler and more harmonically complex. The P-90s had gutsier mids, more bark and compression, and fewer harmonic overtones. Even so, the P-90s and PAFs were more notable for their similarities than their differences.

The PAF has come to be regarded as part of the Gibson tradition, but I would argue it was part of that tradition even when it was new. My ears tell me that Seth Lover was either shooting for P-90 tone minus the hum, or Ted McCarty had instructed him to do so, when he designed the PAF. He succeeded... and then some.

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Fretbuzz

Your letters. This month: in search of The Changin' Times, remembering Merle Haggard and ES-335 advice

LETTER OF THE MONTH

The Changin' Times

Dear *G&B*,

I am not one of your up-and-coming rockers. At 69 I am an ageing rocker trying to grow old disgracefully, if I can. I will be holding a charity event at the Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital in August to raise funds for the Oesophageal Surgery team there. I was diagnosed back in August 2014 and the treatment I got was second to none, with a total of 18 weeks of chemotherapy, 11 hours of surgery and 11 units of blood.

I actually sat down and wrote some songs based on my experiences, and this has been made into a CD, which we are selling – with all proceeds going into the fund. This, we followed with a concert at the Angles Theatre in Wisbech, which was my first time back on stage for 49 years. I made a lot of cock-ups but thoroughly enjoyed it – and I believe the audience did too. My surgeon, Mr Cheong, was at the show and insisted that we do another show in Norwich – and the hospital have kindly let us have the lecture theatre for free, so this goes ahead on 13 August. I am working with my guitar teacher Tommy Loose and his brother, who is a sound and recording engineer. I am 40 years older than them, but hey, who cares?!

I was in a band called The Changin' Times in London back in the mid-60s and we had a great time and managed to support some great bands of the time – The Hollies, Yardbirds and The Pretty Things. We had a full booking list and were working sometimes six days a week with one day as practice, as well as holding down full-time jobs. I was wondering if some kind of editorial trying to see if it can get some of the guys in these long-defunct bands back in touch with each other would work. I have managed to contact our old singer, but the rest: Brian "Biff" Byford (no, not the Saxon Guy), our drummer, Keith "Thrasher" Forde and Tony "Fingers" Ferguson, I have had no luck in finding – maybe the magazine can help.

Keep rocking,

Mike Wallace, via email

***G&B* Thanks for writing in Mike, great to hear from you and best of luck with the gig. Can any readers help Mike put the old band back together? "Fingers" Ferguson, you must be out there somewhere!**

WRITTEN A LETTER OF THE MONTH?

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A dysfunctional family

Hello guys, I must say I was a little disappointed by the misleading headline on the May issue's cover. It clearly says "Wilko Johnson, Kerry King & Daughter". At first, I thought you'd leave this kind of thing to *Take A Break* or a similar such rag, but fair play to them. I'm sure they'd make great parents (although I'm not sure what she'd end up playing like). Imagine my disappointment...

Matt, via email

***G&B* Well spotted Matt. Obviously it should have read "Wilko Johnson & Daughter Kerry King". Oh, hang on a minute...**

RIP Merle Haggard

Totally, and unbelievably, uncelebrated by the UK media, the 'outlaw country legend', Merle Haggard, passed away on 6 April 2016, the date of his 79th birthday.

Of interest to readers, of course, would be the signature guitars he was honoured with, by both Fender: his set-necked, sunburst, bound thinline 'Tuff Dog' Tele, and Martin: the limited-edition Merle Haggard 000-28SMH electro.

I'm no country fan as such, but several of Merle's songs cross whatever boundaries exist in music today. A great talent and, in my opinion for what it's worth, worthy of mention in your illustrious organ.

Rob B Saltmarsh, Suffolk

***G&B* Hi Rob, 2016 has claimed too many guitar legends already. RIP Merle, you were one of a kind**

The 335 that got away

I bought your May 2016 issue because of the article about the reissue dot neck ES-335. The reason for my interest is (drum roll) I've played one of these!

Not quite. I borrowed a sunburst 335 in the very early 70s for several months, playing it mostly through

a blue-cone AC30 and sometimes a Hiwatt 100. I remember the massive neck (which didn't quite suit me) and that the fingerboard had no binding. This seemed odd to me, as did the nylon bridge saddles and the lack of a serial number on the back of the headstock, and I have been uncertain all this time as to what exactly this oddity could have been.

It was light and it had a trapeze tailpiece, an option which has so fallen out of favour as not to figure (seemingly) in any re-issues. It would seem to have been a 1958. The other thing that I remember is the sound: quite definitely the most amazing-sounding guitar I've ever played. I like Gibsons and I've played quite a few very fine ones in search of that sound. Today, my personal electric is a 2010 VOS ES-335 1960 stoptail with Shed PAFs, bought because it's the closest I found after years of looking. My other guitar is a Gibson SG 60s Tribute Standard. But, to the point – this is everything you need to know about the Gibson ES-335, so pay very close attention! The strap button on the heel of the guitar, rather than on the upper treble bout or horn! It's possible, when putting this guitar on,

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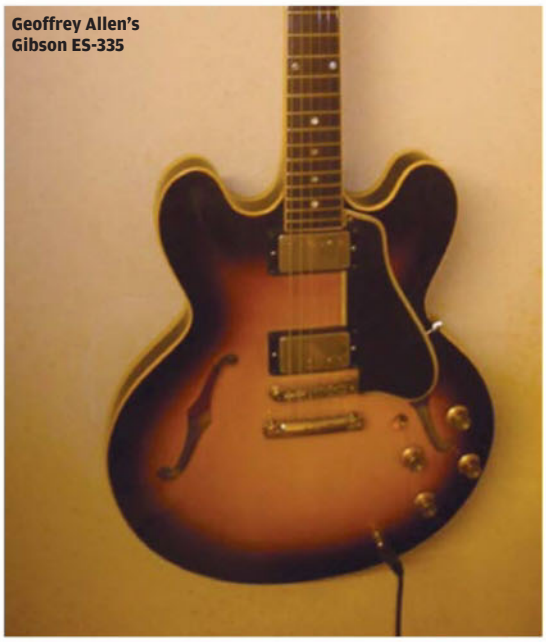

Geoffrey Allen's Gibson ES-335

...and his Gibson SG 60s Tribute Standard

that the strap 'folds' the last inch, unnoticed, being jammed upside down. One fiddles around with one's amp at head height, with the other hand casually on the neck of the guitar and then – whoops! It's on the floor! Yes, I dropped it playing in Windsor Park in front of loads of people! Very, very fortunately, it fell on my feet and I could 'cushion' it, and it hadn't even gone out of tune. Nobody seemed to have noticed, so I carried on, but I played very badly.

I have a 335 and an SG, with a similar strap button arrangement and I have never dropped either of these, but this is all you need to know about the Gibson ES-335. It's a very beautiful guitar. Always check the strap.

Geoffrey Allen, via email

Guitar & Bass

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

1959 Les Paul Shootout!

Two original Bursts, one modern Gibson. How close to the 'real thing' is a reissue and what is PAF tone anyway?

INTERVIEWS

• Ethan Johns • Biffy Clyro •
• Pendulum and more...

REVIEWED

• Fender • Fano • Gretsch • Blackstar •
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VOL 27 NO 11
ON SALE
01 JULY

•Contents are subject to change

New music

We round up and rate a selection of this month's guitar-driven album releases and reissues

Radiohead

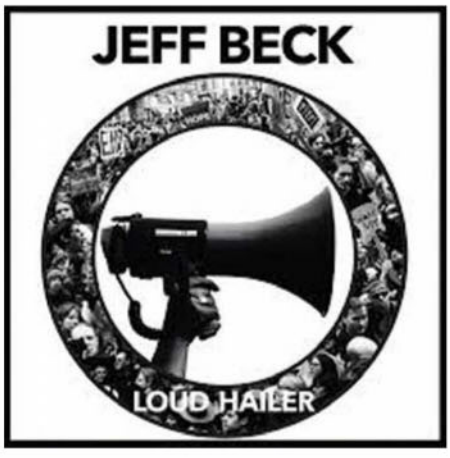
A MOON SHAPED POOL

1995's *The Bends* saw Radiohead's Thom Yorke fuse the snarl of a self-loathing Johnny Rotten with the haunted falsetto of Jeff Buckley on a set of indie-rock anthems that also showcased Jonny Greenwood's gloriously jagged guitar playing and influenced a generation. Though many 1990s teenagers would have been happy for Radiohead to replicate past glories after their bleaker, more ambitious and even better follow-up *OK Computer*, like pop's other great changelings before them – such as Bowie and The Beatles – if you want this band to stand still you are shit out of luck.

Many of Radiohead's experiments have made for uneasy listening; at times, their output has been so alien and desolate that it's been difficult to make an emotional connection. Yet their best work, such as 2007's spellbinding *In Rainbows*, sees the band strike a balance between head and heart, the organic sounds of wood and string and the implied dystopia of machines. Electronica isn't cold by definition, but at times Radiohead strayed so far from their original guitar-band blueprint that they seemed to forget how desperately good at being a band they are. Like *In Rainbows*, *A Moon Shaped Pool* is rich with humanity; there are intricate electric and acoustic guitars, electric bass, acoustic drums and numerous 'band in a room' moments. And where *In Rainbows* saw them finally work out how to present the song *Nude* a decade after its inception, *AMSP* sees Radiohead solve the puzzles presented by a handful of oldies, most notably *True Love Waits*, written in 1995, and *Burn The Witch* from 2000's *Kid A* sessions. If there's a sonic signature to be found amongst this collection, it's provided by Greenwood's angular string arrangements, performed by the London Contemporary Orchestra. Orchestration is central to many of the compositions, rather than being an adornment; it's a continuation of the approach on 2015's abandoned Bond theme *Spectre,* and also reminiscent of *Amnesiac* highlight *Pyramid Song*. What next for Radiohead? Anything is possible, but one thing is certain: *A Moon Shaped Pool* finds the band in a very fit and happy place indeed. **CV**

9/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *In Rainbows-era Radiohead*



Jeff Beck

LOUD HAILER

Beck's back with his first studio album since 2010's *Emotion & Commotion*. While many of the tracks feature vocals and guitar by Rosie Bones and Carmen Vandenberg, and despite lyrics referencing reality TV, and even flirtation with electronic rhythms, lovers of Beck's six-string heroics can rest assured – the album is laced with great moments. *Pull It* is a masterclass in tearing the visceral and nasty from a guitar, with low-end snarls and ring-modulated fuzz providing a machine-like menace. Beck's stand-out performance on *Scared For The Children* encapsulates everything he's loved for – the pedal-steel-style intro and a solo rendered unique by the cadences of his fingers-on-strings technique rival Gilmour at his most lyrical. Able to channel Hendrixian funk, alien worlds and fragile blues into a single phrase, Beck remains the most vital and mercurial guitarist out there. **CM**

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Jimi Hendrix, David Gilmour*

Scorpion Child

ACID ROULETTE

It's been three years since Scorpion Child released their debut, and the follow-up is 13 tracks of classic rock, evoking Wolfmother and Royal Blood. Scorpion Child write paeans to the great hard-rock sounds of the 70s, and the album begins with a Hammond intro before the whole band kick in with a powerful feel that rarely relents. *Acid Roulette* is a modern twist on a revered musical era. **GB**

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Wolfmother, Royal Blood*

Blues Pills

LADY IN GOLD

Dropping you straight in at the deep end of a nostalgic blues-rock sonic trip, Blues Pills' latest is a killer listen. Elin Larsson's soulful, raspy vocal is backed up by some stellar playing and loads of chunky fuzz – a throwback to the likes of Kossoff & Green. The album has the vibe of an energetic live performance throughout, and *G&B* advises you check out Blues Pills immediately! **TT**

9/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Free, Janis Joplin*

Eagulls

ULLAGES

"Is our future grey as the slabs on our drives?" wonders Eagulls' George Mitchell on the excellent *Psalms*. His question sets the mood for a brilliantly gloomy record stacked with gothic atmospherics and hooky melodies. *Heads Or Tails* rises from thunderous toms and a menacing jangle to become something epic, and *My Life In Rewind* is a glorious fog of chorus-drenched chords. A dark delight. **GW**

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *The Cure, Interpol*

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DORIAN SORRIAUX

"My Spinal Tap moment..."

On the eve of the release of the band's new long player, *Lady In Gold*, the gifted Blues Pills guitarist holds court...

1 I couldn't live without my...
"I can't live without the guitar. You can miss a pedal, you can miss an amp, but if you don't have a guitar, you can't play."

2 In another life I would be...
"I would be trying to be a musician. If I didn't feel anything for music, I'd really like to be an English teacher because I think France's English really needs to get better [laughs]. As a Frenchman, I would like to contribute to French people understanding and speaking better English."

3 The moment that started it all...
"Listening to ZZ Top in my dad's car at about four years old, around the time of cassette tapes. That was pretty much when I pictured myself playing the guitar."

4 The one that got away...
"Back in the beginning, like four years ago, Zack [Anderson, Blues Pills bassist] tried to send me an amp from America and the French Post Office fucked it up. It got lost in the mail, and then it ended up being destroyed in the mail and came back to America half a year later, completely destroyed."

5 My Spinal Tap moment...
"On one particular tour, there was supposed to be this journalist that was going to join us for a few days. So we were like, 'we need to slow down the partying because we can't be like that when there is a journalist'. Anyway, we were in Hamburg and we went out and had a few drinks. We came to this pub and for, like, five hours we are just jamming and switching instruments. About five in the morning, I was like, 'What the... is that the journalist?' He had been with us the whole time, partying even more than everybody else."

6 The best advice I've ever been given...
"'Fear is poisonous,' said by Jay Buchanan from Rival Sons. We were talking about stage fright and he was saying mistakes are not a big deal, they show that you are human, and that is our job as musicians – to go out there fearlessly and inspire the people to live their lives without fear."

7 The first thing I play when I pick up a guitar...
"If it's an acoustic, I will play some traditional Celtic songs I learned from my dad and just mess around with those melodies and switch it until someone tells me to stop."

8 The most important thing on my rider...
"Water. Water is cool. You need water. But also coffee and Wi-Fi! And then food..."

9 My guiltiest musical pleasure...
"I don't feel guilty listening to music that I like, I don't feel guilty listening to anything. Why feel guilty about something you love?"

10 If I could learn to play one thing...
"I really love Bert Jansch, but I have no idea how to play any of the stuff on his first record from 1965. It's really complex fingerpicking. I would like to learn more piano. I would like to play the harp, any instrument really. I don't consider myself a guitar player, I really just see music in the big picture."

Photo by Jordan Curtis Hughes

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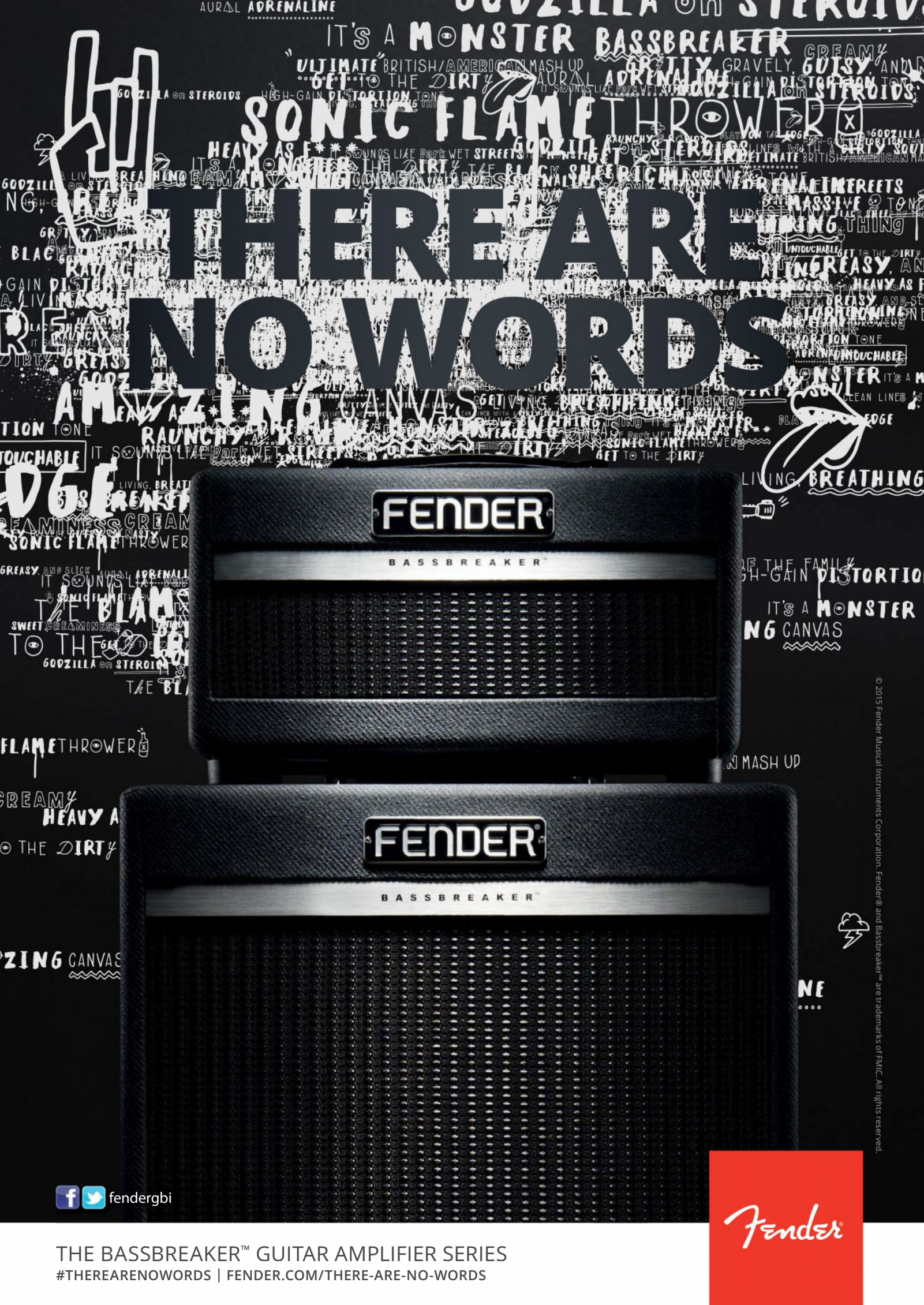

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